University of Alberta

Crippled Transcendence

Brian Friel's use of Stanislavski and Brecht

by

William Kerr ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English
Department of Drama

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring 2001

National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-60312-1

Canadä

University of Alberta

Library Release Form

Name of author: William Kerr

Title of Thesis: Crippled Transcendence: Brian Friel's use of Stanislavski and Brecht

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

Year this Degree Granted: 2001

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Library to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as herein provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.

Bill Kerr

#101 – 9606 105 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 0Z7

January 2, 2001

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Crippled Transcendence: Brian Friel's use of Stanislavski and Brecht* submitted by Bill Kerr in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr. R. F. Ayling

Dr. J. DeFelice

Dr. F. L. Radford

Dr. H. Zwicker

Dr. G. P. J. Epp

Dr. E. Durbach

October 19, 2000

This work is dedicated to Kitty Kerr:

inspiration and setter of inflexible deadlines.

ABSTRACT

This study explores Irish playwright Brian Friel's attempts to use the extra-lingual communicative possibilities of performance to sidestep problems of linguistic aporia and effect meaningful communication. I argue that, at a time when the ability to say anything at all was (and still is) being questioned and in a place where dialogue had been stagnant for years, Friel tries to communicate, to transcend the gap between stage and audience, by melding Stanislavskian identification, Brechtian detachment, and Irish comic performativity. His Brechtian techniques break the fourth wall only to have it partially reconstructed through a more dominant Stanislavskian world of emotional realism yet with the rupture incorporated – a sort of crippled transcendence which appeals to the emotions even while it challenges the intellect. With an analysis of four pairs of Friel's plays, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*, *Freedom of the City* and *Making History*, and *Translations* and *The Communication Cord*, I examine how Friel particularly creates his own form of crippled theatrical transcendence to interrogate, and attempt to transcend, received notions and stereotypes of Irish identity, myth, and history. Trapped by narratives of personal and public (historical) memory and the colonial language in which he is forced to write, Friel examines the creative and destructive potential in his own role as the healer/artist to destabilise untenable received notions of identity and place and to suggest newer more fractured yet more fluid, and therefore tenable, personal and communal notions of them. To do so, he paradoxically insists on the immense difficulty individuals have in communicating with each other while, at the same time in performance, trying actively to "forge...300 imaginations into one perceiving faculty" (Friel). Of course Friel's attempts

to control this interaction also reveals that the uncertainty of ephemeral performance remains. I suggest that Friel insists upon precisely these elusive qualities. In Ireland, where certainty has for centuries equalled death and stultification, uncertainty, however tenuous and anxious, can at least offer a qualified hope.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to especially acknowledge the long hours of insightful work and the tireless and invaluable support and guidance of my co-supervisors Dr. Ron Ayling and Dr. Jim De Felice. I would additionally like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Fred Radford, Dr. Heather Zwicker, Dr. Garrett Epp, and my external Dr. Errol Durbach, for their work and insight. Finally, I would also like to acknowledge my wife, Marina Stephenson Kerr, and our respective parents, Donald and Mildred Kerr and Jack and Marion Stephenson, for her and their emotional, moral, and financial support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction 1

Chapter Two: Right Back Where He Started From

Philadelphia, Here I Come and *Dancing at Lughnasa* 26

Chapter Three: The Healer? and the Healed?

Faith Healer and *Molly Sweeney* 82

Chapter Four: (Re)Making History

The Freedom of the City and *Making History* 145

Chapter Five: "Images of the Past Embodied in Language"

or Fossilised Soda Bread?

Translations and *The Communication Cord* 189

Chapter Six: Conclusion 218

Works Cited: 243

Appendix: Critical Responses to *Translations* 260

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Winning and Losing: Dramatic Communication and Reception

"The dramatist has...to forge...300 imaginations into one perceiving entity,
dominate and condition them so that they become attuned to the tonality of the
transmission
and consequently to its meaning"
(Friel, "Extracts From a Sporadic Diary: *Aristocrats*" 16 December 1977, 43)

The above words reveal that, as a practitioner of theatre, Friel believes in the necessity of playwright/audience communication,[1] yet in the content of his plays he stresses the immense difficulty of any communication whatsoever. In plays like *Translations* he dramatically emphasizes the difficulty, and indeed near impossibility, of accurate translations between cultures, languages, and even individuals. He constantly manipulates language, personal and public history, and dramatic form in an effort to forge that perceiving entity at the same time that he remains sceptical of the possibility of successfully transmitting content to the audiences receiving it.

Why does Friel seem to want to use the most public literary form to communicate that communication is impossible? Why does Friel move from successfully writing short stories to theatre, to a seemingly both more and less communicative medium? On the one hand, theatre allows for the inclusion of personal contact, of unspoken signification, of gesture, of ensemble – the communicative methods of theatre practitioners, particularly in this century of Stanislavski and Brecht. On the other hand, theatre communication is less controlled in that the content is constantly erased or altered depending on both production and reception. The gain in ability to directly contact people is counterbalanced by the loss in direct control over the content of that contact. Perhaps more important for Friel than control over dialogue, however, was the need for dialogue of any kind. Friel needed to speak publicly, to find a way to speak publicly in a nation and at a time where every public utterance was, and is, immediately suspect. The dramatic medium insists upon a public communication no matter how limited, and in a nation where every utterance is suspect anyway, a medium of certain uncertainty perhaps offers the best possible forum -- the hardest one to be overcome by polemics (at least at the moment of performance). Perhaps the reason for choosing plays over short stories is a public need to communicate combined with a public failure to do so. And, in Ireland (at least up to the present, though for how much longer is questionable) there is a receptive and responsive public for serious drama that perhaps has encouraged his lengthy commitment to a public forum

---

[1] Underscoring the importance of this communication to him, he later echoes these remarks in a 1983 interview with *Radio Telefís Éireann* where he talks about forging "five hundred or a thousand people...into one, single receiving imagination" (179). Typically, of Friel, he also undercuts it in another interview, calling this forging a vulgar cheap trick but one that he is attracted to (Finnegan 125-6).

Friel's public speaking is further complicated at a formal level as well. Speaking of Brian Friel and Irish theatregoing in 1975, Denis Johnston said, "We now expect merely to wait for Godot with tickets to Philadelphia in our hands....Third Acts are not now concerned with living happily or miserably ever after, but more usually with the job of getting back to the opening lines of the first Act. The form is circular, and does not noticeably recognize the old formula of a Beginning, Middle and an End" (22). Friel himself concurs that the old well-made play form is dead.

> We can be assured...that there is no going back; and by that I mean that the days of the solid, well-made play are gone, the play with a beginning, a middle and an end, where in Act I a dozen carefully balanced characters are thrown into an arena and are presented with a problem, where in Act II they attack the problem and one another according to the Queensberry Rules of Drama, and in Act III the problem is cosily resolved and all concerned are a lot wiser, a little nobler, and preferably a bit sadder. And these plays are finished because we know that life is about as remote from a presentation-problem-resolution cycle as it can be. ("Theatre of Hope and Despair" 16)

The triumph of this type of causal naturalism lay in its ability to clearly lay out a story and communicate a message to its audience, but, as Friel notes, the audience increasingly came to realize that that message was built on artificial foundations. A recognition of that lack of realism robbed the impact from the message. Friel's words emphasize his rejection of a communication using any type of seemingly naturalistic message play, but they also underscore his commitment to communicate more fully, to articulate a communication that is less remote from reality. Friel's problem is that he wants to convey something real in an unstable form, a form with no Queensberry Rules to follow; and that very instability, paradoxically, may be the key to the transmission.

The Forms of Brian Friel: Stanislavski and Brecht

> 'Words are signals, counters . . . ' Hugh Mor O'Donnell reminds us in one of Friel's most accomplished plays, *Translations*....For the actor working in Friel, language is a vital consideration and the most important way for signals to be conveyed to the audience. In discussing any dramatist, it is important to remember how incomplete the work is until it is performed on stage by actors. (Dowling, "Staging Friel" 178)

Dowling uses words that refer to words, and ones that have been used to highlight the importance of focussing on Friel's linguistic concerns, in order to underscore the need for performance. Especially for Friel, words are "signals, counters" that must be placed in the landscape or context of the stage. A refusal to see those words on stage will result, to finish Hugh O'Donnell's phrase cited above, in their inevitably not matching "the landscape of fact." Over and over again Friel has underscored the importance of crafting plays for the audience. "This is the function of the artist–to select the significant details and arrange them into a significant pattern. Then people will look at the significant pattern and say, 'Of course, this is what it is all about.' And in this way the dramatist then hopefully changes the face of the earth" (qtd. in Funke 70). Friel has also often expressed the specific and faithful way he would like his plays interpreted by theatre practitioners. As early as a 1968 interview with Lewis Funke, he stated, "My belief is absolutely and totally in the printed word, and that this must be interpreted precisely and exactly as the author intended....An analogy I use in this case is: the script of the play is like a musical score, and you present your score to your musicians and you say, 'Play this' (qtd. in Funke 55).[2] At the same time, he believes that "the playwright requires interpreters. Without actors and without a performance his manuscript is a lifeless literary exercise, a kite without wind, a boat waiting for a tide" ("Self-Portrait" 21).

Friel inherits the Irish tradition of verbal theatre, yet a verbal theatre concerned with staging. His detailed and specific use of stage directions suggests that a concern with staging has also been explicit in his plays from the beginning. Friel is one in a long line of Irish playwrights obsessed with stage directions, a line that includes Shaw, O'Casey and Beckett. "In *Philadelphia*, as indeed in all of his other works, we already find the minute stage directions...typical of the Irish theatrical tradition" (Rafroidi 107). Stage directions of course try to direct audience focus,[3] to forge minds into one, to capture the uncapturable, to eff the ineffable. They directly try to control performance and reception. In a medium in which meaning spills over the footlights in the gap between performance and reception, Friel tries to fuse the minds of those receiving this meaning into one, yet at the same time he is aware of the "necessary uncertainty" (*Give Me Your Answer, Do!* 80) of communication.

In order to make this necessarily uncertain communication, Friel has repeatedly stressed the need for a fusion of form and content,[4] and in a search for that fusion he has most often relied on forms which could best be interpreted using a combination of the methods of Stanislavski and Brecht and the traditions of the Irish theatre. Though one might use other terms to describe these methods, I am using "Brechtian" and "Stanislavskian" both because of their dominant influence in Western theatre in the twentieth century and in order to emphasize a focus on theatrical enaction rather than on a more literary textual analysis.[5] As I use these terms, "Stanislavskian" describes a means of production which tries to create an illusion of reality that will involve the audience's belief and emotions and provide a form of closure, whereas "Brechtian" describes a means of production which tries to expose illusions by distancing the audience and provoking a primarily intellectual and open response.[6]

---

[2] Friel also expresses these concerns about interpretation in more detail in 1972's "Self-Portrait" and repeats them as recently as 1999 in "Seven Notes For a Festival Programme".

[3] A quality that Friel underscores by giving stage directions from the point of view of the audience rather than the actors.

[4] For example, see Funke 56, 58 (1968), "The Future of Irish Drama" 14 (1970), and Carty 16 (1980).

Friel is certainly aware of the tradition of experimentation in theatrical form and method in the twentieth century. In his "The Theatre of Hope and Despair," he lists the innovations of "Stanislavsky, Brecht, Freud, the Abbey Theatre, Ibsen, Shaw, Strindberg, Genet, Theatre of Cruelty, Theatre of the Absurd, Happenings, Black Comedy, Theatre of Fact, Disjunctive Theatre, and, finally, the Theatre of Hope and Despair" (14). Notably, he cites Stanislavski and Brecht first, especially as later in the article he will criticize the more innovative forms which tend to exclude more and more of the potential audience.[7]

---

[5] One could, for instance, chart the influence of Ibsen's illusions of reality and the, perhaps closer to reality, anti-illusionism of Strindberg on Friel (not to mention on all of Irish theatre and modern Western theatre as a whole). But such a formulation would focus too overtly on text rather than enactment, and, especially, not on the specific theatrical techniques used.

[6] I am aware that Stanislavski himself, especially with his later work on the method of physical enaction, working from the outside in rather than the inside out, might disagree with this characterization, but, I believe, this is primarily the manner in which his methods have been understood and applied. I am also aware that producing distancing effects is not solely the province of Brecht and that Friel might deny Brecht's influence (and has at times: see note seven below). Comedy in the theatre since the Ancient Greeks has striven for identification and alienation for example, but, in this century at least, Brecht has provided the terms for discussion.

[7] In his "Plays Peasant and Unpeasant," Friel rejects many of the more modern European forms including Artaud's, Brook's, Brecht's and Beckett's, claiming that, for the Irish theatre, content or "matter is our concern not form" (306). While perhaps overstated, given his comments on fusing form and content elsewhere and his rejection of the old forms, and seemingly dismissing experimentation, this statement both underlines

He himself has called Field Day theatre, which he helped found, an attempt to imitate Stanislavski's Moscow Arts Theatre (qtd. in Radin 34), while Eric Binnie has compared the company to Brecht's Berliner Ensemble ("Brecht and Friel"). Noting his early listing of the Abbey experiment and his early staging at, and frequent praise of, the Gate, one might further argue that the more traditional naturalistic impulses and more experimental anti-illusionistic devices in Friel's plays are a legacy from the respective influences of the Abbey and Gate theatres on the Irish tradition.

The theatrical techniques used by Friel to "forge" the audience into a group come predominantly from the Stanislavskian tradition of what may be called "naturalism." Since many critics compare Friel to Chekhov[8] (some of whose work Friel has adapted) it is hardly surprising that his plays should call for the techniques that were originally developed by Stanislavski in order to perform Chekhov's plays. In this technique the actors carefully maintain the illusion of life, of seeming to be the characters they portray, wanting the audience to become emotionally involved with the characters' fates. In his article "Staging Friel," Joe Dowling, who has directed many of Friel's plays, explores the importance of Stanislavski to Friel at some length. He goes into detail in describing the importance of Stanislavskian techniques for the actor doing Friel's plays.

> In Friel's work, for an actor, there must be more than what Stanislavki describes as the 'shallow physical life of the role'. An inner life which takes us behind the language and into the soul of the character must also be created and sustained throughout the performance. The actor and director must find that life within the text and then work outwards. Friel's work, which has so often been compared with Chekhov, demands an application

---

the importance of conveying content with "seemingly formless" naturalism in his work and fulfills his belief that the dramatist must only deceptively play with that form ("Self-Portrait" 15). To be effective, Friel's formal experimentations often have to be disguised. He must enact naturalism in order to disrupt it.

[8] Pine, for example, uses the oft-applied "Irish Chekhov" to describe Friel (*Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 3).

> of the artistic principles of the great Russian teacher and director, Constantin Stanislavski whose collaborations with Chekhov created a new awareness of the strength of emotional naturalism in the theatre. ("Staging Friel" 185)

Dowling also recognizes a counterbalancing theatrical tendency in the plays: "With each new Friel play the director and actor are presented with major challenges of staging, of characterization and often of language and its theatrical possibilities. The staging difficulties usually relate to a correct balance between realism and an instinctive theatricality which is part of each play, no matter how naturalistic the base story" (179). I might add that these comments could also apply to Chekhov. Despite the much improved productions that Stanislavski created of Chekhov's works, Chekhov himself complained that Stanislavski made too much of the tragedy in the plays. Chekhov would have preferred a more balanced approach that included the disruptions of the comedy and such things as symbolic while seemingly naturalistic sound, lighting and stage effects as well as a circular form which never seems to push to its "natural" conclusion. Dowling later adds about Friel that "there is no consistency of theatrical style or a defined approach to language and characterization which a director and actors can fall back on....Friel always makes enormous demands of the actor. The stylistic devices force him to find new ways of expressing character and frequently demand a detailed off stage life which must be understood and imaginatively explored" (182-3). Even as he notes Friel's theatrical flux, Dowling insists on an even greater level of Stanislavskian preparation for the actor, an even more detailed becoming the character to balance the "instinctive theatricality" of the play. Seemingly discussing the importance of the less naturalistic side of Friel's work, Dowling returns to an even greater emphasis on naturalism. More importantly, according to Dowling, "Friel's characters are always rooted in a detailed psychological reality, and however heightened the language may be, it is ultimately in the area of emotional truth that the impact will be made on the audience" (183). It is not surprising therefore that Dowling later dismisses Friel's use of the stage visually: "This lack of concern for the visual environment is typical of a writer who creates mainly through the language and the characterisation rather than through extraneous theatrical effects" (187).

I would suggest that Friel is keenly aware of, and very concerned with, the staging of his plays visually, especially as they help to support a theatrical balance between naturalism and its disruption. Patrick Burke wrote his article, "'As If Language No Longer Existed': Non-Verbal Theatricality in the Plays of Brian Friel," to respond to such theatrical undervaluing, particularly citing Dowling's dismissal of Friel's staging: "some of the critical examination of Friel has tended to under-value the extent to which he is not merely aware of the significance of the non-verbal in drama but...consciously incorporates it as a structuring element in his plays" (14). Patrick Mason, another frequent director of Friel's plays, notes that "there's also a political Friel who knows how to use the theatre as politically as Bertolt Brecht....He has a range beyond his Chekhovian aspect" (qtd. in Clarity E2). Still, David Ian Rabey finds Friel too Chekhovian: "Naturalistic determinism and Chekhovian tragic inertia...[make] Irish plays like Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*...ultimately comfortingly and 'classically' supportive of both nations' [England's and Ireland's] presumptions of inevitabilities. Domestic naturalism and tragic determinism ultimately confirm the limits of identity" (Rabey "The Bite of Exiled Love" 29-30). What Rabey doesn't allow for are Friel's disruptions of the dominant naturalism with what Burke calls non-verbal theatricality; neither does he consider Chekhov's own comic and symbolic disruptions of his tragic naturalism. Friel confirms and disrupts identity. "Resisting the logocentric tendencies of classic realism which attempts to reduce the multiplicity and mystery of being to a single totalising perspective, he seeks to reinstate a sense of the alterity and ambivalence of meaning" (Elmer Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel* 211). The famous director Tyrone Guthrie, Friel's theatrical mentor, remarks of him, "'When one says that Brian Friel is a born playwright,...it means that meaning is implicit between the lines of the text; in silences; in what people are thinking and doing far more than in what they are saying" (qtd. in Bell 103). Guthrie here is suggesting a very Stanislavskian analysis, a reading between the lines to find the subtext, but Friel's theatrical intrusions call for another reading as well. At the end of his "Self-Portrait," having spoken of himself and his work, Friel invites the reader (or audience) to "look beyond [his] innocent outspread hands" (22). His plays call for such a looking (or reading) not only between the lines but beyond them as well. He calls for both a subtextual or Stanislavskian reading and a metatextual or more Brechtian reading.

Other critics do note the debt to Brecht in the non-realistic stage devices in the plays which disrupt the forging and separate the audience into individuals once more. Such techniques force the audience to confront the breaking of the illusion without the illusion actually being broken. In *Translations*, for example, seemingly real people speak the same language and yet cannot understand each other: the audience must consider the artifice in this reality. Identity is both asserted and examined. Ulf Dantanus sees "the influence of Brecht's alienation effect and its intention of presenting a situation in a new and unfamiliar light" ("Time for a New Irish Playwright" 46). Ruth Niel identifies the following Brechtian techniques in Friel's plays: the breaking up of chronological order (353); eyes on the course not the finish (Friel often reveals the end from the beginning, a technique which goes back to Ancient Greek theatre. Indeed, one might note, as Ulf Dantanus certainly does (*Brian Friel: A Study* 89), that Friel's techniques derive as much from the Ancient Greek theatre as they do from Brecht directly.) (353); neutral detachment (353) (though she generally denies the use in Friel of Brechtian *gestus* (351)); the use of a stage manager or commentator (354); direct address (356); and more unusual devices like the dream scenes in *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, darkness for the characters while the audience can see them in *The Communication Cord*, and the split-protagonist of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (357-8). She might well have added the split-language device of *Translations*. More negatively, Robert Hogan says that Friel "remains fascinated by trying out in his basically realistic plays various non-realistic techniques," but "with such structural control Friel hardly needs neo-Expressionistic crutches and neo-Brechtian gimmicks" (128-9). Gerald Fitzgibbon gives a reason for Friel's Brechtian disruptions of his Stanislavskian structure:

> While he consistently exploits the emotive potential of naturalistic characterisations, Brian Friel consistently denies his audience the comfort

> of easy identifications with the characters, or easy identification of the issues. He achieves this by repeatedly confronting audiences with divergent accounts of the 'facts' on which the plays are based, forcing them to observe the effects on any narrative of the speaker's assumptions and capacities, and undermining repeatedly any facile assumptions regarding the reliability or otherwise of witnesses. (61)

Friel uses both Brechtian and Stanislavskian techniques in the plays in order to communicate a kind of inner theatrical partition, possibly reflecting Ireland's partition and the need to look for solutions in/over the divide. Friel's Brechtian techniques break the fourth wall only to have it partially reconstructed through a more dominant Stanislavskian world of emotional realism yet with the rupture incorporated – a sort of crippled transcendence. This crippled transcendance allows Friel, to some extent, to sidestep the question of linguistic aporia and to create additional performative meaning to bridge the linguistic gap. Speaking of Sir's connection to the characters rather than the author in *Living Quarters*, Niel says that "this non-realistic technique here only serves the purpose of creating a new kind of illusionary play, where the play sets up its own conventions which are then temporarily accepted by the audience as real" (355-6). Niel describes well Friel's manoeuvres with form, but Friel puts more stress on it than she acknowledges here. The audience may temporarily accept the conventions as real but they are also aware of them as artifice. Neither does Friel want his plays to become too Brechtian. He doesn't want to lose audience identification. Describing the use of direct address in *The Freedom of the City*, Niel notes that "Brecht wants the spectator to be turned into an observer, but in addition to that in Friel's play emotions are intensified" (356). As Eric Binnie comments regarding *Translations*, "If we try to evaluate the play in Brechtian terms, it must be through the Brecht of quiet subversion rather than the Brecht of chilling rationality and didacticism" (369). Katharine Worth adds, "revisionist emphases draw Friel's audience along a somewhat Brechtian line but not by an overtly Brechtian method" (77). Of course, plays in the naturalist tradition can have intellectual and political appeals just as plays in the epic tradition need emotional appeals in order to make their alienations effective. But plays in the Stanislavskian vein can tend to get mired in passive identification whereas plays in the Brechtian mode have often led to detached observation.[9] Friel desires a detached identification, a balance of emotion and intellect, a balance he consciously and continuously strives for: "I have been educated out of my emotions by my intellectual insight. Now I find it necessary to assert an emotional epiphany out of an intellectual and political grid" (qtd. in Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 223).

In the midst of these attempts to find balanced forms comes a third theatrical technique which is derived, particularly, from what I shall call, the Irish stage tradition of performativity.[10] As well as participating in the shift to more naturalistic, more realistic acting which was being led by Stanislavski at the Moscow Art Theatre, Irish actors at the Abbey were developing a particular verbal, peasant, comic style under the urging of Yeats and the Fay brothers and, particularly, for performing the plays of Synge and O'Casey. Of course, through those plays, the comic rogue techniques already developed by Dion Boucicault in the nineteenth century for the Irish character (itself a more realistic attempt though later derided by the Abbey founders, but not by Synge or O'Casey) also continued to influence Irish acting. Thomas Kilroy says of the Abbey theatre, and indeed of Irish theatre before Friel's *Philadelphia*, "There was a characteristic Irish style of naturalism

---

[9] Lionel Pilkington thinks that Friel's plays also contain this fault, believing that, in *Translations* for example, the "spectator [is unable] to do anything, except passively watch the action on stage, [which] serves as the proof that nothing, in fact, can be done....The audience's acceptance of English as a theatrical convention for Irish–and the recognition that this convention is itself a matter of theatrical expediency–serves as the play's most convincing demonstration of the loss of Irish as a spoken vernacular" (135). However, Pilkington fails to account for Friel's simultaneous foregrounding of the artifice of his convention. Friel engages in identification and detachment, emotion and reason, passivity and action.

[10] Andrews describes this comic impulse in Friel using Bahktin's concept of the 'Carnival' (*The Art of Brian Friel* 71). While this conception does account for the undercutting of authority through the comic or the performative in the plays, it does not explain the further undercutting of the performative itself which Friel achieves through a link to the "authoritative" performative tradition of stage Irishness.

(which so infuriated Yeats) matched by, perhaps engendering, a whole school of naturalistic Irish acting. All of this was based upon a close attention to *surface character* and a usable *stage speech* which accurately *mimicked the vernacular*" ("Theatrical Text" 93; my emphasis). As recently as the 1998 Dublin Theatre Festival I saw Irish actors, particularly older ones, display such a combination of naturalism and comic verbal performance in Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats*, and especially Niall Toibin in Jim Nolan's *Salvage Shop*, and Niall Buggy in Friel's adaptation of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. Friel uses this performativity to offer an additional, often hopeful, connection to the audience when the split in his dominant formal techniques reveals stagnation in the Irish condition. On the other hand, Friel also exposes the failure of performativity in the Irish tradition to effect real change. Performative eloquence may offer comic joy to the audience but it does so at the price of covering a very serious failure of action.

Friel assumes a dominant naturalism and theatrically disrupts it, often using the stage Irish tradition of performativity, in order to appeal to a more general audience and to, indirectly, alter their perceptions. "European dramatists are becoming less indirect, less devious, less cautious; and because of this they are losing their general, family audiences and are attracting a much smaller audience of sympathetic participators" (Friel, "Theatre of Hope and Despair" 16). Wanting a broader communication, Friel rejects the overly experimental in favour of a formal deviousness. He also usually rejects a too direct message to the audience. Ciaran Carty summarizes Friel's rejections in an interview: "He has shunned the fashions of English theatre, avoiding both the Pinteresque concern with dramatizing mood and the Howard Brenton vision of theatre as a vehicle for politics. The English, he argues, can indulge in the rhetoric of propagandist drama because it's safe there: they're secure in a continuing culture which has hardly changed in hundreds of years" (16). Friel wants to make connections with his audience, but he fears that a too direct message or a too experimental form will make them unreceptive. Further, Friel sees such deviousness as an integral part of the dramatic medium:

> Theatre can be experienced only in community with other people. One can stand alone in an art gallery and gaze for three hours at an El Greco; or one

> can sit alone in one's living-room and listen to Mahler. But one cannot sit by himself in the stalls and be *moved* by a dramatic performance and for this reason: that the dramatist does not write for one man; he writes for an audience, a collection of people. His technique is the very opposite of the short story writer's or the novelist's. They function privately, man to man, a *personal* conversation. Everything they write has the implicit preface, "Come here till I whisper in your ear." But the dramatist functions through the group; not a personal conversation but a public address. His technique is the technique of the preacher and the politician....Of course his concern is to communicate with every individual in that audience, but he can do that only through the collective mind. If he cannot get the attention of the collective mind, hold it, persuade it, mesmerize it, manipulate it, he has lost everything. And this imposes restrictions on him because the collective mind is a peculiar mind. It is more conventional than the individual mind. It is more formal. It is not as receptive to new theories....It means that he must work more deviously than his fellow artist. It means that he must work more cautiously. And therefore, because of his indirection and his caution and his obligatory deviousness he is never going to be as ultramodern, he is never going to be as apparently revolutionary. But, if he is of his time, his flux will be as integral but better camouflaged, his groping as earnest, his searching as sincere. ("The Theatre of Hope and Despair" 14-15)

By being better camouflaged, Friel can attempt to communicate a less direct message as well: Friel's "refusal to present a harmonizing solution...aims at a new sensitivity of the audience regarding problems of identity formation and not at a different set of opinions about such problems" (Achilles, "'Homesick for Abroad'" 442).

Friel's words on the public address of the dramatist and the personal conversation of the prose fiction writer reveal both his awareness of the capabilities of the different methods and indicate a potential interest in a fusion of both. After all, before he turned to theatre, Friel was an acclaimed writer of short stories. Always concerned with addressing public issues from within private personal stories, he chose a form that offers a balance between, and a place to explore, both private and public concerns about identity. Theatre is a place of both communal reception and private reception. Each audience member makes his or her own pattern from the options presented by the playwright, yet at the same time all audience members participate in a temporary communal forging of a story, of a memory, as well. "What did the theatre offer the born story-teller to tempt him from a craft that came so naturally? Most obviously, and importantly, a live audience; heterogeneous, unpredictable, a crowd of individuals feeling themselves a community while the play lasts" (Worth 75). Increasingly over his career Friel has become involved with the theatre while maintaining a very literary style. Friel moved from writing short stories to writing radio plays, to writing plays for the stage, to being an observer in the theatre with Tyrone Guthrie, to co-founding a theatre company and becoming involved in producing, and, finally, with *Molly Sweeney*, to directing his own plays. Despite this interest in theatre production, Friel has had an uneasy alliance with his interpreters. As noted, Friel insists on a faithful interpretation; he is concerned about any interference in the connection he can make with his audience: "He's [the dramatist's] not even speaking directly to those people [the audience]. He's speaking through the medium of actors and directors and designers. So that's always the big problem–it's an interpretive art (*Radio Telefís Éireann* 179). But, to paraphrase Friel, it's their job to translate and Friel has chosen to move to a form that must be translated. Friel's uneasy but deliberate inclusion of interpreters signals his desire to maintain a productive flux which he describes as the one constant in artistic communication. "Flux is their [the arts] only constant; the crossroads their only home; impermanence their only yardstick" ("The Theatre of Hope and Despair" 13). Interpreters necessarily maintain that flux. Elmer Andrews, for example, believes that "Friel's commitment to Drama may...be seen as reflecting his deliberate embracement of diversity, heterogeneity, and 'difference'. Drama represents a dispersal of the unified self amongst a range of points of view and gives concrete embodiment to the active interrelations of both internally divergent selves and diverse socially situated voices" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 46). Theatre can be a deliberate attempt to escape certainty, to inhabit the margins, the border, the artistic fifth province. Declan Kiberd, referring to the use of the monologue in *Faith Healer*, says, "The attempt to take an outstanding device of the modern novel, and redeploy it in dramatic form is a characteristic modernist strategy, for modernism loves to mix genres...although...there is one crucial difference. The novel can be reread, the play cannot be rerun to some point of contention. To that extent, the dramatic form is even more baffling and unsettling in its effect on its audience" ("Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*" 106). With the move to the theatre, the mixing becomes postmodern as the dramatic form embraces non-stable interpretations, undermining authority and faithful repeatability as well. W.B. Worthen, following Homi K. Bhaba, outlines "two modes of cultural transmission, the propositional and the positional, a dialectic resembling that between the domain of the text (emphasis on origin, authenticity) and the domain of performance (emphasis on expression, alterity)" (23). Friel's move from the short story to the theatre, and mixing of the two, suggests both an awareness and an embracing of alterity within authenticity.

Living Quarters: the Search for a Postmodern Postcolonial Space

Though I intend to focus primarily on enactment, on the practical means (or forms) by which Friel transmits his content, I also want to touch on Friel's use of an unstable form to locate himself and his work in an unstable position where the postmodernism clashes with the postcolonial.[11] From this position, he can engage both in a questioning of language and authenticity and in an attempt to claim some sort of identity, and particularly identity in language, for a postcolonial Ireland. In order to create what he describes as "Postmodern Humanism," Elmer Andrews argues that Friel "must maintain [in his audience] a constant dialectical rapport between the deconstructive activity of critical judgement (reason) which unveils the fiction's negative, alienating content, and the creative activity of our fiction-making powers (imagination) engaged in a process of symbolic transformation and answering our need for belief" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 67-8). Correspondingly, Friel needed to create a theatre of detachment and one of identification, a theatre moving primarily between those two poles. While asserting a, perhaps more hybrid but still essential, identity based on an adaptation/adoption of Irish/English, the Field Day enterprise, of which he was so integral a part, questions the ability of language to represent. Shaun Richards describes Field Day's mix of these competing theories:

---

[11] While I am aware of the contentious, almost impossible to define, nature of these two terms and their potential overlaps, for my purposes I am referring to the embracing of uncertainties, of multiple and non-originary identity as both the inevitable and potentially productive nature of the postmodern condition and the desire by some postcolonial critics and by many of those living in the postcolonial condition to call upon in contrast the strength of identities, personal and national, prior to and not deformed by the colonial moment. Shaun Richards, for example, in his "Placed Identities for Placeless Times" notes the contention between Homi K. Bhaba and Aijaz Ahmad concerning this issue: "In the postmodern moment, as argued by Homi Bhaba, 'the transmission of *cultures of*

> While the early years of the company may have been distinguished by the attempt, in Edna Longley's phrase, to fuse Derry and Derrida, the period

---

survival does not occur in the ordered *musée imaginaire* of national cultures with their claims to the authentic 'past' and a living present', rather the time for 'organic notions of cultural value' has been replaced by the flow and flux of transnational hybridity. Aijaz Ahmad, however, contests this 'vacuous...notion of cultural hybridity', asserting that this 'stripping of all cultures of their historicity and density...subordinates cultures, consumers and critics alike to a form of untethering and moral loneliness that wallows in the depthlessness and whimsicality of postmodernism–the cultural logic of Late Capitalism'" (67).

Many critics have discussed Friel and both the postmodern and the postcolonial. For a discussion of these issues at greater length in Friel, see F.C. McGrath's full length study, *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama*, and Elmer Andrews' book, *The Art of Brian Friel*. See also Richard Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama*; Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*; W.B. Worthen, "Field Day and the Politics of Translation"; Joanne Tompkins, "Breaching the Body's Boundaries: Abjected Subject Positions in Postcolonial Drama"; Jochen Achilles, "'Homesick for Abroad': the Transition from National to Cultural Identity in Contemporary Irish Drama" (using different terminology); Catriona Clutterbuck, "*Lughnasa* After *Easter*: Treatments of Narrative Imperialism in Friel and Devlin"; and Shaun Richards, "Placed Identities for Placeless Times: Brian Friel and Postcolonial Criticism."

> from at least the mid-eighties to the present has been dominated by the influence of writers such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak; the architects of colonial and postcolonial criticism. The Field Day pamphlet series of 1988, published under the general title *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, included not only Said's *Yeats and Decolonisation* but also contributions from Terry Eagleton and Fredric Jameson whose reputations as critics engaged in front-line debates around colonialism and postmodernism confirmed the intellectual orbit within which Field Day intended to operate. ("Placed Identities" 55)

Richards surveys Homi K. Bhabbha, Terry Eagleton, Aijaz Ahmad, Simon During and others to delineate the potentially productive postmodern challenging of any stable, authentic, originary identity alongside the postcolonial desire to assert an essential self prior to deformation by the colonizer. Quoting Kevin Robins, he suggests that what Friel most desires is a fusion that will "salvage centred, bounded, and coherent identities – placed identities for placeless times" (68).

Both F.C. McGrath and Elmer Andrews note the influence of the postmodern in Friel's work. McGrath says that "Friel especially has followed the lead of Joyce into distinctly postmodern modes of perception and into developing literary modes appropriate to them" ("Language, Myth, and History" 535). Andrews adds, "Everything is fiction. There is no such thing as reality, only versions of reality....So runs a line of postmodernist thinking that underlies much of Brian Friel's dramatic writing....Yet, however problematic reality may be for Friel, plot and character are not entirely done for in his plays....The mendacity and unreliability of fiction do not stop it having a social function" ("The Fifth Province" 29). Andrews' qualifying of the postmodern impulse suggests that, despite Friel's deep skepticism about the relationship of representations and reality, the playwright still wants to make some sort of authentic social connection. "What Friel then is dramatising is the simultaneous need and practical impossibility of literally returning to the source" (Richards "Placed Identities" 63). Andrews' term "Postmodern Humanism" describes these dual impulses in Friel. Andrews suggests that "Friel resists the apocalyptic tendencies of the Postmodern, advancing instead what we might call a 'New Humanism', an existentialist aesthetics which is critical of, as well as informed by, certain aspects of Postmodernism. For he is as much concerned with reconciliation, reintegration, synthesis, accommodation as with their impossibility" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 63).

Field Day as a group, and its members individually, have been concerned with mixing theory and practice. The Field Day pamphlets and *Anthology of Irish Writing* both have contributed to, and, indeed, have helped construct, the theoretical debate in Ireland and have been, rightly, castigated for their exclusions and biases. Theorists like Terry Eagleton and theorists and poets like Tom Paulin and Seamus Heaney have explored the ramifications of their ideas in plays written, or adapted, for and performed by the company. While perhaps not as accomplished as the melding of ideas and performance achieved by Friel, each has been, at least, an interesting failure (or qualified success).

Using both theory and performance, Field Day tries to create a space for representations and dialogue beyond the traditional nationalist and unionist split in Irish discourse, and beyond its own nationalist origins. Comparing Field Day with the early days of the Abbey Theatre, Jochen Achilles assigns the Abbey to the nationalist camp which Field Day responds against:

> If, in the early years, the Abbey of Yeats and Lady Gregory tried to foster heroic nationalism, the Field Day of Friel, Kilroy and others may be said to question the lingering remnants of this nationalism and to replace it tentatively by a model of political self-definition which opts for the integration of otherness rather than its exclusion. Field Day is thus involved in propagating 'the idea of a culture which has not yet come to be in political terms,' an artistic 'fifth province' which transcends the status quo of nationalism and sectarianism. ("'Homesick for Abroad'" 436-7)[12]

---

[12] Friel, Rea and other Field Day board members have repeatedly called for an artistic "fifth province" to describe their cultural attempt to bridge political difficulties. For example, see Friel qtd. in Patrick Quilligan's "Field Day's New Double Bill" 193 or

As Friel puts it, "The decolonisation of the imagination process is very important if a new Irish personality is to emerge" (qtd. in O'Connor "Friel Takes Derry by Storm" 159). Yet for all the attempts to locate a new cultural home, Friel maintains that "there is no home...no hearth...I acknowledge no community" (qtd. in Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 6). Colm Kelly states that "in the politics of Friel and Field Day, the directors of the company are the guides showing the people the way home" (461), but Friel, at least, remains suspicious of the idea of homecoming at the same time that he is committed to it.

Despite Achilles' characterizations of Field Day as a repudiation of the early Abbey, the new company also makes a homecoming of sorts to the old.[13] Field Day both reacts against and is linked to the Abbey tradition and the Abbey images. Stephen Rea believes that Field Day can provide the cultural/political focus that "Yeats provided" for the country (*Radio Telefís Éireann* 185). According to Friel, "The purpose of Field Day...is to provide a brave and vibrant theatre that in some ways expresses his country. He thinks of Yeats and the Moscow Arts Theatre" (qtd. in Radin 34). Both Field Day and the Abbey make a conscious attempt to remake national images culturally before politically: "Everything, including our politics and our literature, has to be rewritten–i.e. re-read. That will enable new writing, new politics, unblemished by Irishness but securely Irish" (Deane, "Heroic Styles" 18). Deane's famous formulation of Field Day's conscious attempts to re-imagine the notion of Irishness in Irish representations reveals both a desire to evolve that notion and a desire to stay rooted in it. Deane himself compares the two companies, saying in the programme note for *Three Sisters* that Field Day is "like the Abbey in origin, in that it has within it the idea of a culture which has not yet come to be in political terms. It is unlike the Abbey in that it can no longer subscribe to a simple

---

the *Radio Telefís Éireann* interview with Friel, Rea, Heaney, Deane, Hammond, and Paulin "Brian Friel and Field Day" 185-91.

[13] Verstraete 85; Maxwell "'Figures in a Peepshow'" 50; McGrath "Introducing Ireland's Field Day" 145; Jent 509; and Murray "'Recording Tremors'" (24) all compare Field Day to the Abbey.

nationalistic basis for existence" (qtd. in Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel* 61). Even as Field Day attempts to escape previous images which have become stereotypes, like the peasant Abbey tradition, the dominance of the link reinscribes them, and, of course, these include the stereotypes which the Abbey reacted against as well. In the colonial situation, identity has been established and deformed by the stereotype of the other. In the Irish theatrical context, stage Irish identity has depended on a series of movements rejecting and accepting new Irish images, but always in reaction to the previous stage Irish image.

This problem is related to the general postcolonial problem of trying to move beyond the domination of the colonizers while inevitably using their language and their forms. Friel writes in a language, English, and a form, theatre, which come down to him from the colonizer, from without. Of course, in the Irish context, this problem was most famously posed by Joyce concerning language (the replacement of Irish by English, in large part), but Friel's *Translations* stands as the most important recent literary posing of this question through the ironically necessary dramatic device of expressing both Irish and English in English. In pursuing uncertainty in meaning, Friel is perhaps seeking a solution to the postcolonial problem of speaking and creating literature (and in the form of theatre especially) in the language of the colonizer. If the uncertainty of linguistic slippage or catachresis has been used by the colonizer in brutal mistranslations, at least it now allows possibilities for the colonized. The colonized can use this slippage to change the meaning of the "mother tongue" and, by re-translating, to recreate to an extent the language of the colonizer. Elmer Andrews, rightly I think, describes Friel as agreeing with the "Post-Saussurian view...that subjectivity is substantially constituted by language but he refuses to accept that it is wholly a product of discourse" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 208).[14] Similarly, as McGrath notes, Friel has a poststructuralist view of history as another textual discourse, but he still wants to retain some sense of the power of the more positivist belief in History as a discipline ("Language, Myth and History" 538-40). Friel receives a great deal of textual attention in relation to his linguistic and historic explorations, but sometimes forgotten is the importance of performance to these projects and to considerations of Friel's plays. "He [Friel] was drawn to the theatre, because there the audience can see very clearly the disjunctions between the language someone displays and the contexts in which it is transacted. It is the place for realizing the *lack* of congruence between the word and the situation" (Welch 147).

---

[14] See Andrews' chapter on "Body," Kearney's "Language Play," and O'Gorman's "Defenders of the Word" for a more detailed analysis of Friel's linguistic position, which they chart as being somewhere between skepticism and belief, between a positivist notion of language as functional and a Heideggerean one of language as a "House of Being," and between the individual being constructed by language and being prior to it.

Given the plurality of his concerns, often expressed in terms of dualities, it is not surprising that, formally, Friel tends to focus on duality and circularity within each play and within his work as a whole. Friel embraces this duality for its inherent ambiguity and contradiction. Coming from Ireland, and particularly from the partitioned Northern Ireland and the split city of Derry/Londonderry, Friel is all too aware of the contradictions which abound in any attempt to define Irish identity and of the ambiguities which arise when trying to defend the purity of essence of either side in the debate over identity and place. Given his inheritance of both language and theatrical form from without, Friel, in attempting to define or at least discuss personal and communal identity within Ireland, finds it valuable to have room to manoeuvre outside the preestablished linguistic and theatrical norms. If hegemonic qualities in the English language function to reinscibe an inferior Irish identity, Friel finds it useful to explore the instability in identity readily available in the theatrical form. If that form too must constantly be influenced by the past construction of a stage Irish identity, then slippage is doubly important.

In the cultural debate, because of its commitment to some sort of origin, to a notion of home, Field Day as a whole may have ended up on the nationalist side even while it tried to embrace supranationalisms. Field Day's producing of fixed texts (like the pamphlets and the *Anthology*) have increasingly obscured their more productive successes in the area of their "original" commitment: plays in performance. W.B. Worthen, among others, in his "Homeless Words: Field Day and the Politics of Translation," criticizes Field Day for its attachment to tradition while ostensibly being engaged in redefinition. In addition, he specifically censures Field Day's plays specifically for clinging to origins, especially in adaptations, despite the desire to expose and assert the power of discourse in constructing that or an "original": "Its [Field Day's] major works for the stage–*The Riot Act* and *Translations*–seem poised to use "translation" to frame questions of history and agency, while at the same time finding in "translation" a vehicle for the faithful enunciation of cultural mythology, the reiterative authority of the classic" (24). Despite such a reading, Worthen later adds that the interpretations, the agency, of performance in the plays can productively trouble fixations on tradition. In particular, he notes that Friel's *Translations* can be interpreted so that the uncertainty, the deceptive flux, of performance can destabilise notions of mythical origin even while it repeats them: "By foregrounding the performative limits of Irish English, *Translations* at once expresses nostalgia for the sense of identity authorized by the collocation of language and cultural origin, and foregrounds the rhetorical work that this sense of language performs in forming the myth of nations" (35).

Friel's plays have been informed by and have explored the practical, material conditions of, the sociological and cultural concerns of, and the historical influences and revisions of Ireland, and specifically Northern Ireland. In addition, Friel has been informed by the broader theoretical and philosophical concerns of postmodernism and postcoloniality as seen in his attachment to the Field Day enterprise and his use of theory and debate as sources for his plays. As he does by including George Steiner's ideas in *Translations*, for example, Friel literally puts theory into practice. By doing so, he takes theory from the page to the stage and offers it practically, and of course deceptively, to the audience in the theatre: "their [theories'] presence is felt precisely because it is latent, tacit, offering forms of discourse not availed of by the characters but which might well be useful to an audience willing to participate in the collective experience of the play" (O'Brien 77).

Most particularly, Friel has striven to find theatrical forms sufficient to move his audience and therefore to powerfully convey his complex message. Friel has used Stanislavskian techniques to assert powerful and moving essential identities which he then ruptures through a Brechtian distancing in order to provide a view of identity as constructed. Friel's reincorporation of the formal rupture within a more dominant

Stanislavskianism then reasserts the power of the claim to an essential origin while acknowledging that such a claim must be constructed. Friel's crippled transcendence allows him to appeal to the emotions with the moving slice of the characters' lives and to the intellect with a distanced "offering of other forms of discourse not availed of by the characters."

A Communication Cord: Seeing the Plays in Tandem

I intend to examine Friel's explorations of memory, identity, history, language, form, space, and the role of the artist by looking at four pairs of Friel's plays. An examination of pairs allows a comparative look at Friel's formal theatrical inventions and re-inventions, to see the extent to which Friel insists upon dual views of similar forms or concerns. It is appropriate, I think, to look doubly in an examination of a playwright concerned with doubleness in a land of theatrical doubling from Yeats to O'Casey to Beckett, to Murphy, to Kilroy. Friel begins by writing very personal plays, examining identity and the crisis of identity in Ireland, before moving, especially since the founding of Field Day, to more public topics and more public forums.

As many critics have noted, he searches for a way to speak that involves personal memory and identity in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* and *Dancing at Lughnasa*. I will particularly argue that he does so through his explorations of theatrical techniques. In both he uses the formal device of a split character and space to express fractures in identity. In the former a dominant naturalism leads to a debilitating stasis, but, in the latter, subtle manipulations distance that naturalism, creating a space for potentially enabling, though still very difficult, movement. In *Philadelphia*, the split-character's, Public and Private Gar's, insistence on an essential memory to help define an essential identity serves instead to reinforce the fracture, whereas the split-character's, adult and Boy Michael's, acceptance in *Lughnasa* of constructed memories as essential to identity allows for a bridging of the divide. Technically, Friel signals that bridging by having both Michael's speak with one (the adult narrator's) voice and by keeping the Boy Michael disembodied, while the double-casting of Gar as the two personas, Public and Private, signals a more unbridgeable distance.

In *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*, Friel examines his own role by looking at the creative/destructive role of the healer/artist–with particular relation to gender. He switches from a focus on questioning the artist's ability to function in the role of the healer in the former play to a focus on the potentially devastating results on the supposedly healed in the latter. I will particularly claim regarding *Faith Healer* that the three versions of the story given insist ultimately on a resistance to the certainty of what many have described as the Faith Healer/Artist's brilliant, cathartic authoring of self – an authoring of course that, in order to be certain, inevitably ends in death. In *Molly Sweeney*, Friel's focus on the effects on the one being healed reveals a further distrust of the healer/artist's powers. Seemingly similar, yet ultimately different storytellings–the three characters supplementing, circumscribing, and at times overriding, rather than directly contradicting, one another–reveal a tendency for the men, who both function to an extent in the faith healer/artist role, to construct enabling personal memories and identities at the cost of completely overriding the identity of the female supposedly being healed. Friel's deliberate choice of a female patient suggests a particular concern with the effect of his own work on Ireland and on women with particular respect to the representations of woman as Ireland in his own work and in Irish literature more generally.

With *Making History* and *The Freedom of the City*, Friel moves to attempting a reimagining of history and public identity, which will have resulting effects on the personal as well. Contrary to most critical responses, I argue that, at its core, *Freedom of the City* retains too strong a sense of Stanislavskian essential identity despite the numerous Brechtian distancing devices. I argue that *Making History* replies to the same concerns about the role of public histories and discourses in forming national, and personal, identities. But, this time, Friel stages what seems to be clearly essential Stanislavskian identities before disrupting them with a subtle incorporated Brechtian distancing at the core. I suggest that the play ought to be revalued more highly for pointing a way to claim the power of both, of a constructed essential identity. Friel insists on the importance of making a coherent pattern of the past to enable identity in the present while also insisting on revealing that making.

Throughout Friel is interested in language and its role in all of the above, and he particularly explores it in *Translations* and *The Communication Cord*. Rather than focussing on Friel's concern with discourse in general and in *Translations* in particular, which is well-documented, I will focus on the undercutting of that concern and the supposed pieties of the earlier play using its sister play, *The Communication Cord*, which is far less documented. This play on its own, and with respect to what it reveals about the undercutting of piety in *Translations*, stresses the skepticism that Friel maintains about enforcing any of his insights in any of his work. Such a position allows Friel to maintain an uncertain, productive flux, one that can sidestep many of the stultifying perennial Irish debates about history and identity, and one that can manouevre between desires for origin and an insistence on the impossibility of authenticity. From this space, using the methods of Stanislavski and Brecht, Friel can create fictions which offer enabling memory, history, and identity while insisting on their fictional status, an insistence that may allow for a productive use of them on both sides of the Irish debate.

CHAPTER TWO: RIGHT BACK WHERE HE STARTED FROM?

PHILADELPHIA, HERE I COME! AND *DANCING AT LUGHNASA*

> I don't know. I–I–I don't know.
>
> (*Philadelphia, Here I Come!* 99 – 1964)

> When I remember it, I think of it as dancing. . . . Dancing as if words no longer existed because words were no longer necessary . . .
>
> (*Dancing at Lughnasa* 71 – 1990)

Dancing at Lughnasa appears to mark a return for Brian Friel "right back where [he] started from" – the implied second half of the title of his earlier play *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* After a quarter century and the intervening strife and political responses, Friel left Field Day and its public concerns to write a play once more devoted to personal concerns and, particularly, to personal identity. The lines above which end the respective plays show a search for knowledge of the self and the ability to express that identity. The protagonists, Michael and Gar, try to reconcile themselves to their communities and families, and to the memories of both which form their personal identities. In *Philadelphia*, Gar is about to leave that community without resolving any of the issues of self, while in *Lughnasa* Michael reflects back on the community he has left and at least reconciles himself to a notion of self, even if he cannot resolve all the issues of identity. Formally, Friel splits the identity of the protagonists literally in two; however, in *Philadelphia* Gar remains split into two actors, Private and Public Gar, while in *Lughnasa* Friel incorporates the split into one actor, the narrator Michael, who speaks for both the present and the invisible past self. Friel also repeats the creation of the environment in which identity must be forged by having both memory space and real space, but Friel reverses his focus so that in the former concrete stagnant space dominates, while in the latter fluid memory space prevails.

Despite Friel's desire to escape from any simplified and sentimentalized notion of

Irish identity or Irishness, he also returns, with *Lughnasa,* to what could be described as a peasant verbal drama in the Irish tradition. The plays succeed with an international audience primarily because of their Irishness. These plays, which could be called his most "Irish" plays–along with *Translations*–have been the greatest international and commercial successes of Friel's career. "Friel's three greatest successes have [been] so by offering audiences an image, a composite of cultural icons, which they can identify as 'Irish'" (Roche, *Contemporary* 105).[15] But their popularity internationally comes at a cost. By exposing the emptiness and powerlessness of Irish "blarney" or eloquence, Friel tries to escape from any simplified notion of Irishness in *Philadelphia*, but this play, like the other two, is admired for its Irishness, its eloquence, its blarney. The three, more than any other of his plays, successfully reach a mass audience, yet they can reaffirm the very notion of "Irish" identity that Friel is trying to escape.

Friel writes deliberately from within what could be called a stage Irish tradition of peasants and eloquence. To quote the title of his article on Irish theatre, he wants his plays to be both"Peasant and Unpeasant." He wants to embrace a "Theatre of Hope and Despair"--the title of another of his articles. Only from within the existing tradition can Friel search for new definitions or at least new shadings to old definitions. By working from within the English language and the inherited English, and then Irish, theatrical tradition and theatrical form, from within a colonized language and form (and one that traditionally casts, and has created, the Irish as peasant and in despair), Friel wants to suggest an "unpeasant" potential which might contain some "hope" for escape from this stultifying definition and situation. Friel himself says, "All my characters are the stock ones of Irish plays....I use the stock people and then have to make something of them" (qtd. in Farleigh 49). In writing from within the theatrical tradition, Friel follows a long line of Irish playwrights who working from within the form helped change both the perceptions of the Irish and the form itself. Of course, those playwrights, particularly those of the Irish Revival, also left Friel the peasant tradition from which he is trying to escape.[16]

---

[15] Kathleen Ferris identifies Friel's use of the tragicomic mode as the one most pleasing to his audiences and the one used in both these plays, but she too notes that the plays spring from Irish life (129). One might suggest that such bittersweet plays have become part of the Irish tradition, and so Irishness, since at least as early as Synge and O'Casey.

Yet, after refusing to cash in on the "Irish" success of *Philadelphia*[17] with more "Irish" plays,[18] Friel returns, after thirteen plays and three adaptations, to a rural, peasant, parochial Ireland in *Lughnasa*. Friel returns to this starting place to review and recycle personal identity, Irish identity, and Irish stage identity. In particular, he returns to the importance of memory in forging identity. In these plays Friel both examines the role of memory in creating a "natural" identity and queries any simple unquestioning acceptance of the link between stable memory and stable identity. Friel moves from the disabling effect of rejecting important formative yet ultimately fictional memory in *Philadelphia* to the enabling effect of acknowledging fictional memory while embracing its formative truth in establishing a more positive sense of self in *Lughnasa*–a play entirely dependent on memory. In both, Friel uses a split theatrical form in order to express these dual views of memory and identity. With this theatrical partition, Friel also appeals to both the emotion and the intellect of his audience: in a Stanislavskian manner, he creates stable or natural identities, characters with whom the audience can identify, and then, in a Brechtian manner, undermines the stability and "naturalness" of that identity. In the midst of this balanced partition comes a third theatrical technique which is derived, particularly, from the Irish stage tradition of performativity. On the one hand, by appealing directly to the audience, the exuberance of performativity in Friel's plays offers hope beyond or through the stultifying split; on the other, it can also link Friel to the stagnant "broth of a boy" stage Irish stereotype that has defined–and often defiled–Irish identity both on and off stage.

---

[16] Friel certainly reacts to the Irish images created by Yeats, Lady Gregory, Synge, O'Casey, and subsequent Abbey playwrights, but they in turn reacted against the images of the Irish created by Anglo-Irish playwrights like Congreve, Farquhar, Sheridan, Macklin and Goldsmith and particularly and directly Dion Boucicault each of whom might be described as reacting in turn to an earlier Irish image. In such a way the image of the stage Irishman moved from a taciturn fighter in Shakespeare's *Henry V* to a verbal blunderer to a verbal wit, one with subversive potential.

[17] Later, he responded to the "Irish" success of *Translations* by writing an entire play, *The Communication Cord*, to refute any notion of sentimentalized peasant Irishness.

[18] Although many of these plays were set in, or near, his fictional small rural town, Ballybeg, the plays didn't have the same feeling of naturalistic Abbey nostalgia. Some, like *The Mundy Scheme*, parodied nostalgia for Ireland, while others, like *The Gentle Island*, exposed the savagery beneath the surface.

Leaving for *Philadelphia*

Friel reveals that Gar's failure, in *Philadelphia*, to embrace enabling memory, and thus to move beyond a split in his identity, leaves him in eloquent stasis, a sort of paralytic "broth of a boy." Indeed Gar, despite a desire for enabling memory, compulsively collects disabling memory instead:

> Private: "You know what you're doing, don't you laddybuck? Collecting memories and images and impressions that are going to make you bloody miserable, and in a way that's what you want isn't it?" (58)

Gar lingers over his negative memories of his failures with women, his would-be-bride and would-be mother, while he challenges privately and then publicly his positive memories of "successes" with the lads and, especially, with his father.

Gar, both Private and Public, uses verbal eloquence and clowning to try to cover his preoccupation with memory. Despite the distraction of his verbal blarney, memories like that of Katie Doogan, the woman he wanted to marry, become more and more forceful until his head can no longer contain them and they must be enacted on stage (39-44). This memory even overwhelms Private's attempts to mock it (40), and he too loses his ironic distance as he becomes a willing participant: "God, I will, I will" (42). This memory of his failure to ask her father for her, and thus his loss of Katie, achieves such power over Gar that his memory reaches to encompass debilitating lines *which he could not possibly have heard* pass between Katie and her father; these lines emphasize his failure to act:

> Kate: Where's Gar?
>
> Doogan: He didn't seem anxious to stay.
>
> Kate: But didn't he--did he--?

Doogan: No he didn't. (44)

Friel elongates this moment to underscore Gar's absence using careful details of staging: first he has Doogan light his pipe while alone, then he has Kate enter, and finally he has the lights fade slowly as Doogan exits–all with Gar off stage. This memory scene ends with Public trying to ignore the pain it induces by singing the title song once again, as he has done as a sort of clowning talisman since the third line of the play. As both Neil Corcoran (18), and Daniel Leary (130) note concerning the implications of the implied second half of the title, each repetition of this title line becomes less and less exuberant, and the second half of the line comes to dominate. Gar, no matter where he goes, will be "right back where he started from" dwelling in his unresolved memories.

The next enacted memory scene of Gar's aunt and would-be mother, Lizzie, reveals that his resolve to move forward, to go to Philadelphia, to try to forge a new identity in a new place, remains rooted in his attempt to reconcile himself to the past, to staying in Ballybeg, to his current identity in the old place. References to Katie's wedding taking place concurrently with Lizzie's visit (60, 62) serve to link these two memory scenes together. The future that might have been is linked to the future that will be, and at the same time as Public Gar accepts the latter he wants the former, as seen in the reversal of Private's continually avowed desire to go to Philadelphia: "Don't lad don't" (65). Even the stage directions, which show Gar's discomfort at Lizzie's touch (60) in comparison to his earlier embracing of Katie, suggest Gar's preference. Lizzie tries to spell out the possibilities for a new identity for Gar in America, "Gawd's own country" (64), listing a number of materialistic possibilities and claiming that one can remember Ireland through "a big collection of Irish records" (65). Yet her immediately expressed desire and reason for being there–to get Gar to come to America as her "son"– reveals the problems with Lizzie's collecting of records or possessions. She too has come back to the old place to make a tangible personal connection. The scene closes with Gar in "*happy anguish*" (66), split in desire, uncomfortable at Lizzie's touch, and finding in the possibility of Philadelphia only a substitute comfort, mother, place, and identity.

After wallowing in the negative enacted memories of attachment, or lack thereof, to women, Gar switches to trying to find some solace in his memories of, and attachment with, males. Gar shares, or at least has shared, his sense of clowning with "the lads," but their scene together reveals that Gar and the lads clown in order to desperately try to cover silence: "*tranquillity is the enemy*" (69). Silences recur regularly and must be defeated (71-2). The lads try to defeat the silence by inventing images of themselves past, present, and future. Public Gar challenges this process of invention briefly by doubting Ned (71), but, upon creating a silence, he lets it go as the others frantically cover up the intrusion of the real. Private Gar meanwhile exposes to the audience the facts underneath the blarney (73), revealing that in his memory Gar sees the "heroic deeds" for the failed gestures they were and are. Private makes an attempt to reconcile the memories of the lads, to see the fun in the failures and inventions, but, even as he claims that these memories will be "distilled...[in]to precious, precious gold" (77), his just recounted memories of the inglorious real belie his words. Gar will remember the painful real rather than the enjoyable invented.[19]

Joe's wanting a real connection with Gar shows Joe not being "*fully committed to the boys' way of life*" (69); this "enjoyable" invented life serves only as a constructed escape and not a real identity. It is only a diversion not a resolution. Gar nevertheless encourages Joe to join the bluster, the broth of the boys, in order to gain comfort in a fiction that Gar can no longer enjoy: in this place at this time such a diversion is both necessary and hollow. Ned's reference to his own father as "a bloody stupid bastard of an aul fella" (75), which so echo Gar's comments about his own father, suggests that Gar's stultifying condition is far from unique among the lads, but Gar is trying to move beyond merely covering up the silence.

---

[19] Elmer Andrews (*The Art of Brian Friel* 87), Nicholas Grene ("Truth and Indeterminacy" 10-11, 17-18) and Neil Corcoran (17) all claim that the memories will in fact become precious gold in future remembrance, but they fail to note that the scene belies Private's claim. Gar can no longer accept the willing self-deceptions. He deliberately challenges the boys' memories. Gar's problem is that he can no longer easily distill such memories into precious gold. He needs, he seeks reaffirmation and finds it nowhere. What he is distilling is anything but gold.

Indeed, Gar, in an immediately following speech to Katie, tries to reject all memory, all past identity, any and every place:

> All this bloody yap about father and son and all this sentimental rubbish about 'homeland' and 'birthplace' -- yap! Bloody yap! Impermanence -- anonymity -- that's what I'm looking for; a vast restless place that doesn't give a damn about the past. (79)

Katie's presence, which inspires this speech, also immediately undermines the words. Gar's anger here shows that he gives "too much of a damn" about the past. Gar might want to lay claim to a cosmopolitan rootlessness but he is dogged by a need for authentic connection. After Katie exits, Private mulls over past memories and the memories just created on stage in a film-like montage of images that gets stuck replaying Katie's final words: "goodbye, Gar, it isn't as bad as that-- Goodbye, Gar, it isn't as bad as that--goodbye, Gar, it isn't as bad as that--" (80). He is caught in rewind.

In the face of Private Gar's repetitive images, the scene and the Episode end with a move to Gar's most important attempted connection: a desperate plea from Public Gar to his father, a plea for a positive shared connection with his father and his past that will enable Gar to move forward with some of the issues of place and self resolved:

> Public: (*In a whispered shout*) Screwballs, say something! Say something, father!
>
> *Quick Curtain* (80)

The very manner of saying these words, as well as the words themselves, suggest the delicate balance Gar inhabits and exhibits at this point in the play. Public Gar appeals with the vocal oxymoron of the "whispered shout" to both "Screwballs" and his "father." The split in his personality has been physically present on stage from the beginning, but increasingly the fragile balance is exposed rather than covered up. The following quick curtain freezes attention on the plea and sets up the final episode as a response to Gar's desire to make this last and most important connection with his father.

But the next Episode begins with no connection and indeed no speech at all from S.B. or from Public Gar; instead Private Gar is furiously covering the public silence of the muttered rosary. Private's covering here does evolve into an articulation of what Gar needs from his father; he needs to believe that his father too hoards memories and, in particular, shares one memory of "great happiness" (83) of fishing, sitting in silence, and eventually singing in a blue boat when Gar was a little boy (82-3). But this articulation is not communicated. The Canon enters before any public overture can be made and Public Gar instead retreats to his private room where he puts on music that, for him, makes the plea to his father which Private articulates:

> PRIVATE. Listen! Listen! Listen! D'you hear it? D'you know what the music says? (*To* S.B.) It says that once upon a time a boy and his father sat in a blue boat on a lake on an afternoon in May, and on that afternoon a great beauty happened, a beauty that has haunted the boy ever since because he wonders now did it really take place or did he imagine it. (89)

Private's plea outlines the conditions at the same time as it raises the stakes for acceptance of this shared memory, yet silence greets it. On the real public level, the Canon and S.B. barely hear the music and dismiss it as a minor annoyance.[20] Part I of Episode Three ends with this dismissal and a slow curtain (90) which emphasizes the lack of connection in the public space, a lack which lingers on in a mundane non-communicative routine.

Finally, in the second part of the last episode, Gar makes his appeal directly to his father. This time, urged on by Private, Public Gar covers the silence, rushing to close the distance between himself and his father. Anthony Roche points out that Public Gar takes on the role of Private Gar as well; he comes close to a whole persona: "It is notable on-stage in Episode Three how quiescent Private is, how close Public is to operating on both levels of reality and in both registers of speech simultaneously, to what extent full psychic integration may be possible" (*Contemporary* 100). Gar reveals the treasured memory only to have his father dash his hopes, and Gar will not listen to his father's possibly different version of that same memory: Gar must have all or nothing. Nor will he stay to learn that his father has a memory of Gar as a boy, which Madge rejects without changing S.B.'s belief in it. "They try to reach across the long-frozen feelings between them, casting back and forth a thin filament of memory. It snaps" (Kauffmann 28). With the failure to make this connection, Gar has exhausted his possibilities, and his potential integration dissolves.[21]

---

[20] For more detailed discussions of the use of music in the play, see Harry White, "Brian Friel and the Condition of Music" and "Brian Friel, Thomas Murphy and the Use of Music in Contemporary Irish Drama"; Patrick Burke, "'Both Heard and Imagined': Music as Structuring Principle in the Plays of Brian Friel"; and Elmer Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel* 91-93.

Seamus Heaney claims of memory in Friel, rightly I think, that "the problem which Friel, his characters and his audience face constantly is this: how to decide between a tender-minded allowance of memory's authentic reinforcements and tough-minded disallowance of its self-serving deceptions" (231). He goes on to claim regarding the failed memory connection between Gar and his father that

> the Councillor's [S.B.'s] humdrum grip on the facts does not and is not meant to deny the creative truth of Gar's memory of a blue boat. Instead the dramatist is implicitly insisting upon the authenticity of that visionary, transformative faculty which reinforces and gives energy to a life in touch with its impulses towards individuation. In other words, Gar O'Donnell – Gar Public and Gar Private united by action and in total self-consciousness – this whole Gar derives a confidence of identity from his image of the past, an image whose contents may be questionable but whose truth has been proved acceptable. (233)

Heaney here accepts the tender-minded impulse too easily. Certainly, Gar, Friel, and possibly even S.B. would like the integration that an acceptance of this formative yet fictional memory would provide, would like to claim the power of authenticity, but Gar refuses to accept it without confirmation. The play instead shows Gar being too tough-minded, challenging the truth of the memory until it and he lie shattered.

---

[21] Many critics stress the importance of the testing of the father/son memory bond in the play, with some claiming that it, not the split identity nor the impending emigration, is, or should be, the focus of the play. For example, see Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel* (94); Maxwell, "'Figures in a Peepshow'" (54); Dantanus, *Brian Friel: A Study* (97-8); Worth (78-9); Grene, "Truth and Indeterminacy" (9-10); Heaney (232-3); and, at greatest length, Fitzgibbon (53-6). See particularly McGrath, *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* (70) for a suggestion that this should be the centre of the play and isn't.

Instead, Gar's failure to embrace an enabling memory link will leave him as he is at the end of the play, split and close to both paralysis and silence. Gar will "keep the camera whirring" (99), recording yet another debilitating image that will rewind and play again in his head over and over. With his final statement of lack of self-knowledge and lack of direction -- "I--I--I don't know" (99) -- Gar reveals that he has no eloquence left, and the quick curtain (99) leaves the silent void dominating over the failure of the words of the broth of a boy to embrace real connecting speech and enabling memory. Friel's early work, and *Philadelphia* in particular as Seamus Deane suggests ("Introduction" to *Selected Plays* 12, 16), identifies the great Irish eloquence with failure. By the end of the play even this covering eloquence has deserted Gar and he is left stammering, unable to speak or to know himself. He is disabled by memory.

Friel: from Philadelphia to Lughnasa

In this very personal play Friel includes himself and his own memories, as he does with *Lughnasa*; he puts his own memories and identity into play in order to create inclusive and ultimately enabling factual fictions. Both *Philadelphia* and *Lughnasa* have personal dedications: in the case of the former, to Friel's mother and father, while in the case of the latter, to his five aunts. The protagonists in both try to work out relationships with mothers, fathers and five aunts. As critics like Richard Pine (*Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 19-20) have noted, the memory of the boy and father in *Philadelphia*, which Gar treasures, is remarkably similar to Friel's own memory of himself as a child which he reveals in "Self-Portrait" (18), a memory that Friel acknowledges as important and formative yet not possibly a fact. Friel, who has become increasingly reluctant to give interviews, to speak of himself, acknowledged in discussions with both Julie Kavanagh and Mel Gussow in preparation for *Lughnasa's* North American premiere, that the story of his own aunts, two of whom ended up destitute and dying on the streets of London, influenced the writing of the play: he wanted to tell their story. Yet he also notes that he made fiction from the facts of their story. He had seven aunts not five, but "economy is more important than truth" (Gussow 56). Or perhaps fiction is – there are five sisters mentioned in *Philadelphia* as well. He further notes that he had "aunts with those names and an uncle who came back from being a missionary in Africa. [His] aunt Rose was a simple girl" (Kavanagh 134). In fact, Friel sees his job as a playwright to be one of creating fictions of his own life, ultimately enabling ones for him personally. In his discussion with Gussow, Friel explains that in moving from fiction to theatre he did not leave fiction behind: "Theater is fiction too....'Lughnasa' diverged from precise reality. . . .The play provides me with an acceptable fiction for them [his aunts] now" (60). Or, as he notes in an interview with Fintan O'Toole, the content of the plays come from "a particular corner of yourself that's dark and uneasy" ("The Man From" 22). He wants in both plays to take his own memory, fictional or otherwise, and create enabling fictions of his own: one, *Philadelphia*, which exposes the destructive potential of disabling factual memory and another, *Lughnasa*, which reveals the potential of enabling fictional memory.

Arriving at *Lughnasa*

Having left *Philadelphia* with a final focus on the negative self-destructiveness of an insistence on purely factual memory, Friel returns in *Lughnasa* to the question of memory and identity, stressing this time the potential of enabling memory, whether strictly factual or not, to support and indeed create identity. Memory in *Lughnasa*, which is after all a memory play in its entirety,[22] acquires the capabilities that Friel stresses in his own personal memory: it can be both fictional and formative: "The facts. What is a fact in the context of autobiography? A fact is something that happened to me or something I experienced. It can also be something I thought happened to me, something I thought I experienced. Or indeed an autobiographical fact can be pure fiction and no less true or reliable for that." (Friel, "Self-Portrait" 18) From the first line of *Lughnasa*, Friel invokes this kind of memory and rememberer: "When I cast my mind back to the summer of 1936 different kinds of memories offer themselves to me" (1). With this line, "Friel establishes that this is a play in which the techniques of stagecraft subject the ostensible, a very spare 'action,' to the scrutiny of memory" (Fusco 110). He explicitly focuses attention on the play as a memory play and the "different kinds" of memory that will be invoked: fictional and factual. Indeed, the narrator, Michael, who was seven in 1936, the same age as Friel in that year, functions as a surrogate for Friel and performs much the same function as the playwright: storing, recollecting and recreating memory into "an acceptable fiction."[23] Michael's opening speech continues with a list of memories, like Gar's montage of images, but Michael, unlike Gar, accepts that positive or negative, fictional or factual, these were the images, the moments, the fragments that shaped him. As Elmer Andrews says of Friel more generally, "An authentic self can only be created in full acknowledgement of past actions and values. Friel seeks to rescue us from fragmentation without imprisoning us again in oppressive dogma" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 67). Michael's more liberally accepting memory allows him to incorporate fragmentation without fusing it into dogmatic "truth." Michael states that in his memory he began to be aware as early as age seven of a certain unease concerning a split between events as they were (facts) and as they ought to be (fictions): "I know I had a sense of unease, some awareness of a widening breach between what seemed to be and what was, of things changing too quickly before my eyes, of becoming what they ought not to be" (2). From the beginning of the play Friel stresses the uneasy breach between memory and reality, the breach that can, as in *Philadelphia,* split the self irrevocably. This play will examine that breach and indeed widen it before suggesting ways it can be bridged or at least accommodated.

---

[22] Nicholas Grene describes it as "Friel's most thorough-going memory play yet" ("Truth and Indeterminacy" (18).

---

[23] Many critics have pointed out the autobiographical nature of *Lughnasa*, suggesting that Michael is Friel's proxy in the play (Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 225; Capecchi 282; McMullan 91; Peacock and Devine 126). Christopher Murray has pointed out the autobiographical nature of the material while maintaining that "Michael...is not Brian Friel" ("'Recording Tremors'" 28-9). Both McMullan (91) and Peacock and Devine (126) point out the coincidence of the ages, but Catriona Clutterbuck suggests the problems with too closely linking Friel and Michael, and indeed the time line itself, by noting that Friel describes Michael as a young man in the list of characters (113). We may assume the narrator to be in the present speaking directly to us, but, if he is, the present must be in the 1960s rather than the 1990s. The ages of Michael, child and adult, both link and disrupt the link to Friel. Michael, the narrator, functions in many of the same ways as Friel but cannot necessarily be equated with him.

With its split between narration and action, the very form of the play itself insists on a breach that is particularly experienced by the audience. The juxtaposed narrative and enacted scenes call attention to a "consciousness of form" in the play (Fusco 118), a consciousness which Friel makes explicit to the audience.[24] The narrator always prepares the way for the events to come by introducing important events or details which the audience then experiences for the first time as a culmination of their expectations, as already a sort of memory, as something they have come across before. The events confirm the narration; the audience experiences the event as proof, as factual. At the same time, the audience also experiences a breach between the telling of the events and the events as they happen, both in terms of time and in terms of content. Chronologically, the events told of and the events happening are separated on stage. Furthermore the difference between the time of the narrator and the time of the events is constantly reinforced by physical separation and by the presence of the young/old split narrative character. Substantively, the events can never quite match the descriptions prepared in words; the first time the audience sees the "facts" they are already different from their preconceptions or "memories" of them. Thus the facts seem to have fictional qualities as well.

By the end of the play the audience knows that the world they see will disintegrate at the same time as they see it suspended in happiness, before the narrator's final memory of dance fuses both event and narration and the audience's feelings about, and memory of, dance in the play. Rather than leave an image of rural happiness juxtaposed against the narrative of brutal industrial progress, Friel continues to Michael's final memory, a memory which Michael acknowledges as not possibly factual:

---

[24] Kosok points out that Friel calls even more attention to form by excluding dramatic action from the enacted scenes, and placing them in the narrative sections instead: "All the...events, dramatically far more important than the scenes shown,...have been relegated to dispassionate narrative passages by Michael (pp. 41-2, 59-61, 70-71)" (165). Friel similarly excluded action in *Making History*, but to a far greater extent, calling attention deviously in that play, as in this one, to Friel's own constructions.

> But there is one memory of that Lughnasa time that visits me most often; and what fascinates me about that memory is that it owes nothing to fact. In that memory atmosphere is more real than incident and everything is simultaneously actual and illusory. (71)

For the audience as well as the narrator memory has become malleable. Event, the actors' swaying in the background, and narrative have become one. "Like memory, our experience of the play itself is ambivalent. The liminal movement and sound act to undermine our sense of a solid, fixed reality" (Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel* 232). Regardless of whether it happened or not, the memories of dance, prepared for and enacted, now coalesce under one final memory. Mel Gussow describes his experience and memory of dance in the play: "In a surging *coup de theatre*, the women create a spontaneous revel – not at Lughnasa but in their rustic home. Carried aloft by the beauty and the frenzy of the dance, theatregoers also share a moment of ecstasy. The play concludes with a linguistic refrain of the earlier choreographic image" (30). So this final and most important formative memory is a sort of memory for the audience too. It recalls the single most positive experience of the play for the audience. The narrator and the play caught in the staged juxtaposition of positive event and negative narrative opt for a third choice of enabling formative fictional memory, while at the same time acknowledging its fictional nature. The memory of dance takes over from, coalesces with, words to form a more dominant communication as they dance "as . . . if words were no longer necessary" (71). The silence that had been a dreaded vacuum in *Philadelphia* now becomes a desired goal, and Michael is, "rightly or wrongly" (61), at least sure of himself in the contemplation of that silent dance. As Heaney says more generally of Friel, "False memory sends the quester into the land of self-deception, into the limbo of meaningless deception; but true memory gives access to the dancing place, the point of eternal renewal and confident departure" (240). Ultimately, Gar cannot dance, cannot even move, in memory, while Michael displays his access to that space.

One could argue that this ending marks a self-indulgent acceptance of the sentimental over the imperative of the real, a turning away from the harsh reality of such things as the industrial revolution rather than a coming to terms with the past as it was in order to enable a present and future that might be. Fintan O'Toole argues persuasively, in his article "Marking Time: From *Making History* to *Dancing at Lughnasa,*" that–after having, in earlier plays, exhausted the possibilities in, and power of, language and history to enable any real change or to even describe what has been, is, or will be–Friel turns away from any real political imperatives and becomes, instead, a post-nationalist playwright revelling in the flawed power of theatre and the consolation of memory. "The committed writer is a writer who has faith in politics, in history, and above all in the power of language, not merely to communicate things but also to change them. Friel is a writer in despair at, or in flight from, all these things" (205). O'Toole, accurately I think, traces Friel's questioning of the power of politics, history, and language to enable real communication or real change, but that does not mean that Friel rejects commitment. At precisely this point, beyond the traditional and ineffectual discourses and ideologies, Friel reveals his commitment. He recognizes the stasis in the current political, historical, and linguistic conditions, the stasis in the reigning hegemonic ideologies in Ireland and sees them mirrored in the personal. At this root level, in *Philadelphia* and *Lughnasa* at the level of personal memory and identity, Friel commits himself to a personal re-imagining that may then reverberate on the public level. O'Toole notes that Friel, like Yeats and the Abbey Theatre before him, "has seen art, and in particular theatre, as filling a political vacuum." He adds that "filling a vacuum though, also means operating in one" (208). That precisely is the point. The forming of Field Day, with the desire for it to be an artistic fifth province in which productive debate could take place and change could be fostered across borders, is an attempt to create a space between or outside of the existing possibilities. Operating in this vacuum means operating in what Friel believes to be the only possible place to generate change. At the end of *Philadelphia* the vacuum of self and silence is inescapable and static, but by the end of *Lughnasa* the vacuum of silence is pregnant with enabling possibilities.[25]

O'Toole is nonetheless excellent in describing Friel's production of theatrical tension between enacted memory and narrative which sets up the ending:

> "The tension which provides the drama of *Dancing at Lughnasa* (the play is almost entirely without direct conflict) is the tension between the onrush of time, on the one hand, and the frame within which time is frozen and contained on the other. Its brilliance lies in its ability to structure the falling apart of things, the terrible widening of the hair cracks, within a form which is the opposite of these things: full of ease and gentleness and apparent stasis, a form in which time seems suspended...And this freedom with time culminates in the stunning switch forward to the future that lies ahead for these characters and then back to their present frozen moments of golden calm with which the play culminates. Here Friel captures precisely the tension which is at the heart of theatre itself, its ability to keep alive its characters only so long as they are on the stage, its pervading irony that to freeze people in time is to mimic the action of death, that even the most pleasurable conjuring up of memories on the stage is evanescent and must lead on to death." (211-12)

Death, however, need not be an end. Friel's final moment lies beyond this fatal juxtaposition in a deliberately imagined space in which time does not freeze memory because the memory never in fact happened. His final moment appeals imaginatively beyond the stultification of juxtaposed remembered event and future narrative, beyond the limiting finality of theatrical death.[26] Contrary to O'Toole's suggestions of Friel's surrendering to imagination, this moment is not a political surrender or a surrender to death; it is a cry instead to bring imagination back into language, history, and politics and so to a renewal of life.

---

[25] McMullan explores Friel's alternative commitment in greater detail (95), while Clutterbuck believes O'Toole's claim still stands but suggests a middle ground where Friel challenges existing ideologies without showing a way to move beyond them (102-3, 109-10).

[26] This appeal beyond death is reminiscent of some feminist playwrights' attempts, as for example Caryl Churchill's in *Fen*, to find a place to speak in a place after death (or "death-space") which is outside the normal oppressive rules. These attempts certainly do

Friel's hope for imagination in life can be seen in the difference between Gar in *Philadelphia* and Michael in *Lughnasa*. Rather than collect disabling "factual" memories and challenging enabling "fictional" ones, as Gar does, Michael collects all memories, embracing the most importantly formative, such as the final moment, regardless of factual accuracy. Rather than linger over negative memories of his wandering and absent father, as Gar similarly does with his dead and absent mother, Michael accepts Gerry as a sort of absent presence. He even further accepts the mixture of ideologies, without having to embrace one as a paternal or patriarchal authority, that come from his other father figure: Uncle "Father" Jack. Finally, rather than challenging positive memories of his past with women, as Gar does of his past with men, Michael embraces, from his beginning list (1-2) onward, the positive memories of and connections with the women in his life, their dance, their presence, and ultimately their power. This time the father figure does not represent a present and debilitating, though impotent, authority.[27] This time the female is not an absent

---

not grandly sweep away oppressive patriarchal or other dominant hegemonic ideologies, but they may pry open a small space in which to communicate. See Elin Diamond's discussion of the death-space in *Fen* in her "(In)Visible Bodies in Churchill's Theatre" (191).

See also Nicholas Grene ("Truth and Indeterminacy") on the frequent use in Friel of characters speaking after death in plays like *Lovers*, *The Freedom of the City*, *Living Quarters*, *Faith Healer*, and *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Michael Etherton also describes the particular importance of characters' self-awareness after death in *Faith Healer* and *The Freedom of the City* (186-88).

[27] For a discussion of the crippling effects of the at the same time strangely impotent father figures in five Friel plays, including *Philadelphia*, see Marilyn Throne's "The Disintegration of Authority: A Study of the Fathers in Five Plays of Brian Friel." For a discussion of Gar's need for, and failure to commit, symbolic patricide, see Thomas B. O'Grady's "Insubstantial Fathers and Consubstantial Sons: A Note on Patrimony and Patricide in Friel and Leonard."

and largely self-created fantasy, as in *Philadelphia*.[28] *Lughnasa* responds to earlier criticism of Friel and his obsession with fathers and sons which even went to the extent of his adapting Turgenev's novel of that name. Now, finally, in *Lughnasa*, Friel leaves behind the damaged and damaging connection between fathers and sons and looks, instead, for a connection between mothers and sons: one with the potential to enable change.[29] In short, Friel moves from a main character who challenges memories of, and thus ties to, his community to one who acknowledges and accepts an enabling communal influence on his identity.

Still, Friel could never be accused of being too sanguine, particularly about the power of his plays to effect change, and he has already offered in two earlier plays, *The Loves of Cass McGuire* and *Living Quarters*, cautions about the dangers of embracing too easily either completely fictional or completely factual memory. In *Cass*, the title character, though she initially rejects it, later accepts fiction to the exclusion of all else as a substitute for a bitter reality in which she has no value. In *Living Quarters* the characters cannot escape from the brutal facts laid out in Sir's book – there are no other alternatives to the inevitable destruction, no other ways in which they can function. By foregrounding these messages in the theatrical techniques at the heart of these plays, Friel ensures that the audience most powerfully experiences the horror of both existences. Cass begins as a sort of narrator, one who speaks directly to the audience. She is our window into, our connection to the play. She rejects the fiction of the fourth wall. Yet as the play moves along she gradually withdraws until we lose that connection entirely. She succumbs to the temptations of fictional memory, and we are left horrified and implicated as the spectators at a now fully illusory theatrical experience. Friel compounds the sensation of horror by then showing the cycle inevitably continuing with another old woman entering, speaking directly to the audience, and swearing that she will never succumb to the temptations of fiction. On the other hand, Sir in *Living Quarters* acts as a stage manager, the representative of the director and author, on stage, using his book to control the actions of others. He insists to the end solely on the facts as they are set down and so must inevitably be. This time we watch the events inevitably play out, despite the objections of the characters, yet we are also made aware (by means of the device of the stage manager) of the tyranny of a theatrical form that insists on inevitable tragic fate, and our emotional participation in the narrative march towards the ending that must be. At the centre of these plays, through the theatrical techniques which ultimately shape them, Friel warns both of the tyranny of fictional memory and the tyranny of factual memory. These two plays are part of the investigation of memory and theatre which Friel makes on the long yet also ultimately circular road from *Philadelphia* to *Lughnasa*.

---

[28] Richard Pine (*Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 76), Anthony Roche ("Friel and Synge" 151), and, at greater length, Neil Corcoran (18-20) all comment on the absent mother in *Philadelphia* and in Friel's plays more generally.

[29] Friel switches, as critics like Richard Pine have pointed out, from a male focus to "publish[ing] the daily dealings of womenfolk as he has never previously" (*Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 228). Joan Robbins goes so far as to criticize Friel for not making the men "dramatically convincing" (85). Even Claudia Harris, who, in her article "The Engendered Space," criticizes Friel in general and this play in particular for limiting women, allows that at least with the dance of the Mundy sisters Friel has created a space which women can claim. Still, as Anna McMullan notes, Friel continues in much of the play in perpetuating the link between women and the non-rational (97). McMullan also cites Fintan O'Toole's comments on a male creating this representation of the female to support her query on the female voice in Irish theatre: "if the male playwright occupies the site of the feminine in the cultural space of representation what effect does this have on the female voice?" (100) While a simplistic appeal to the female for change is also full of potential pitfalls, including a repetition of the stereotype of women as changeable, a placing of a male-created burden on the female, and a potential usurping of voice, it does at least offer a fresh perspective and, perhaps, possibility.

Staging *Philadelphia*; Staging Ireland

A trip spent observing theatre in practice under Tyrone Guthrie in Minneapolis gave Friel the impetus and ability to write *Philadelphia*, marking the beginning of his more confident experiments with theatrical form:

> "[I]t [the time with Guthrie] was an important period in a practical way. I learned about the physical elements of plays, how they are designed, built,

> landscaped. I learned how actors thought, how they approached a text, their various ways of trying to realise it...But much more important than all these, those months in America gave me a sense of liberation–remember this was my first parole from inbred claustrophobic Ireland–and that sense of liberation conferred on me a valuable self-confidence and a necessary perspective so that the play I wrote immediately after I came home, *PHILADELPHIA, HERE I COME!* was a lot more assured than anything I had attempted before." (Friel, "Self-Portrait" 20)

Friel gained both the desire to express his perspective on claustrophobic Ireland and the practical ability to do so, theatrically.[30] In this play, the most obvious theatrical tool chosen to express the stultification of the Irish individual is the split Public/Private protagonist, a split which is augmented by Friel's use of memory, space, and time. This device reveals the stultification of the community as well. By using the split, Friel suggests the cracks inherent in the relationship of individual and community, as well as in the individual personality: this play "involves...a utilisation of theatrical techniques to subject the culture to examination, to expose fragmentation and incoherence where a totality has traditionally been asserted, and to project this as the delirium or psychological dilemma of one representative character" (Roche, *Contemporary* 84). Friel wants to show the private longing in the public lack, the private desire to communicate combined with the public failure to do so. "The division of Gar...is an imaginative measure intended as a critique of local and familial narrowness and repetitious, mundance [sic] routine. The two Gars taken jointly, comprise a picture of wholeness that their environment will not allow" (O'Brien 50). The questions the play ultimately asks are: can the character find any solace in memories of self and connection to community that will heal the split sufficiently to enable one fully confident personality to move on? Can the individual gain more than just a "parole" from Ireland? Can the nature of the prison itself be changed?

---

[30] For more on Guthrie as an important director and his influence on Friel, see Friel's own comments in "An Observer in Minneapolis." See also Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel* (56-7), and Dantanus, *Brian Friel: A Study* (50-53, 87-8).

In order to ask these questions of the audience theatrically, Friel uses the split protagonist to increase Stanislavskian identification and Brechtian alienation at the same time. Michael Etherton writes in *Contemporary Irish Dramatists* that "*Philadelphia, Here I Come!* still has a tendency towards Naturalism, although Friel is now beginning to puncture naturalistic conventions with contradictory theatrical forms" (156). Friel's stage directions reveal his naturalistic and contradictory intentions with this dual character:

> The two Gars, PUBLIC GAR and PRIVATE GAR, are two views of the one man. PUBLIC GAR is the Gar that people see, talk to, talk about. PRIVATE GAR is the unseen man, the man within, the conscience, the *alter ego*, the secret thoughts, the id. PRIVATE GAR, the spirit, is invisible to everybody, always. Nobody except PUBLIC GAR hears him talk. But even PUBLIC GAR, although he talks to PRIVATE GAR occasionally, never sees him and *never looks at him*. One cannot look at one's *alter ego*. (27)

The actor playing Public in particular must *never* breach the naturalist convention of "talking to himself." The actor must perform the role in this sense entirely within the bounds of the Stanislavskian tradition of performance. Private's role then magnifies this tradition by allowing access to a deeper emotional and psychological inner truth which the Stanislavskian naturalist tradition strives for. Audience members can thus identify with Public's emotional journey in the play, supplemented by the revelations which access to the id supplies. F.C. McGrath certainly concurs with this reading of the play, calling Friel's split here a "post-Romantic" revealing of the inner self, and criticizing those who claim that the split functions as a "modernist" illustration of the "divided self" (*Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 69). He rejects Elmer Andrews characterization of the split as a "postmodernist 'dismantling [of] the unified subject'"(69). Andrews, however, at least concerning the technique, seems to agree with McGrath, comparing the play with Arthur Miller's original title for *Death of A Salesman* (*The Inside of His Skull*), and suggesting both plays offer expressionistic stagings of the "protagonist's mind" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 84-5). Corcoran's reading of the technique embodies the "postmodernist" reading which McGrath argues against: Corcoran describes this "theatrical representation" as "pseudo-Brechtian alienation," insisting "that all selves are performed selves" (17).[31]

At the same time that they insist on naturalism, Friel's lengthy stage directions indicate his awareness that the audience, as well as the actors, will question how this split works and what it represents. He recognizes the Brechtian distancing that the split implies and goes so far as to describe this split as "a necessity" for the play to work (qtd. in Funke 56).We may accept the convention, but we will be aware of it as convention. Nor is our awareness that simple. Richard Tillinghast notes that "considerable time passes before we notice that Gar (Private) is invisible to the other characters and that, in the words of the stage notes, Gar (Public) 'never sees him and *never looks at him*. One cannot look at one's *alter ego*'" (36). Without access to the stage directions, the audience awareness of the "naturalism" of the split is gradual. What Friel first creates is uncertainty. Walter Kerr, in his review of the original New York production, describes the doubling as both "true" (116) and a "trick" (115). The true trick reaches the audience on two levels at once: intellectual and emotional. In doing so it reinforces the central contradiction inherent in the character, and the play, which the trick reveals: the split psychological and emotional paralysis of a young man in this community, one who cannot publicly speak what he privately feels:

> But there has to be still a better answer to explain the play's power of openly affecting audiences–by openly I mean to unrestrained tears–while keeping its sassiness intact and its central trick busy. The answer, I think, is that the play *needed* its trick if it was ever going to tell its truth. The conceit of the double person was something absolutely demanded by the material, not something ingeniously added to it. The play was about man's failure to speak what he feels; but we could not have had the play at all–not *naturalistically* [my emphasis], and not in prose, if we had not had one

---

[31] Neil describes Friel's technique as Brechtian at length in her article on "Non-realistic Techniques in the plays of Brian Friel" (357-8). She also notes Eugene O'Neill's earlier use of a similar device in *Days Without End* (358). For a detailed comparison to O'Neill, see Dantanus, *Brian Friel: A Study* 89-93.

> dumb ox who failed to speak and one dancing devil who felt. The core of the play was rent by contradiction; it had to have twins to plead its case. (Kerr 115-16)

Guthrie, perhaps most accurately, describes Friel's trick as "a modification,...an elaboration of the soliloquy" (qtd. in Bell 103). Like a soliloquy, the split device allows for both closer audience identification with the speaker at the same time as providing a distancing from events. As Nicholas Grene says, "the device of Private Gar...makes it possible for Friel to interrogate this scene, not merely represent it" ("Friel and Transparency" 140).

Kerr's response above also reveals another level upon which the split operates theatrically: the level of public silence and private speech. Repeatedly throughout the play (47-51, 73, 77, 81-3, 87-90) Private speaks when no one publicly is speaking: private eloquence covers public silence. Some of the actual public "silences" in the play would naturalistically dominate minutes of stage time without the desperate rearguard action of Private covering all silences with his eloquent speech. Unfortunately for Gar, as the play increasingly reveals in these scenes throughout, eloquent covering of silence is an escape not an answer.

The scene with the lads reveals in microcosm the larger problem with covering silence in the play and in the larger community. In this scene, as we saw earlier, all the covering of silence nets the lads is a disabling fantasy not an enabling reality. From the moment of their entrance their noise defeats itself. The lads enter, appropriately, with a burst of noise that shatters one of the few carefully established actual silences on the stage, both public and private. S.B.'s actions during the silence–not realizing his paper is upside down, looking to Gar's room, being unable to read, and exiting (68)–reveal poignantly and quickly more of S.B.'s feelings about Gar than any talk in the play. When the lads then burst on stage, they destroy what had been a communicative silence, and they do so with false boisterousness. Their noise is clearly second rate compared to the previous silence.[32]

---

[32] At the beginning of the second part of the last episode, S.B.'s silent actions in the middle of the night–looking at Gar's cases, touching Gar's coat, and staring at Gar's

To underline the false quality of their noise, as well as the actual quantity of it, Friel has Madge ironically comment, "Just thought I heard somebody whispering" (69). While Madge suggests the falseness of the lads' speech from the beginning of the scene, Private is the one who will directly reveal the hollowness of the lads pursuit of discourse at any cost, but ironically Private can only do so by himself covering a revealing public silence (73). Again, at the end of the scene when Public is alone, during what should be an uncomfortable public "silence," Private speaks (77). Private only repeats what is shown to be a self-defeating mode of discourse; he also covers silences, albeit with more subtlety. Ultimately Gar is like the lads and the lads are like Gar. Indeed, the presence of the lads suggests an army of Gars throughout the community, all split and unable to publicly speak their private desires. "Their endless reminiscence of imaginary seductions conceals a reality – made apparent to us – of futile street wanderings; cold; locked doors; drawn blinds; confined perspectives. All the vistas forebode dead ends" (Maxwell, "Imagining the North" 94-5). When, near the end of the play, Gar attempts to speak to his father, Private's comment that "silence is the enemy" (93) reveals he is still trapped in the same way of thinking as the lads. As such his attempt will be doomed to failure. The truth of Kerr's "trick" is that it *is* only a trick – the public silence remains.

The long public [33] silences covered by Private's discourse in the scenes between Gar and his father further show that, in the end, despite all Private's efforts and desires, silence will still ultimately dominate. In all three long scenes including S.B., Private covers the lack of public discourse while making a plea to S.B. for a shared spoken "public" discourse which never materializes. When his father, S.B., is first introduced, Private provides a clowning running commentary before making an almost but no longer clowning plea to publically bond with S.B. which his father, of course unaware of this plea, doesn't

---

door–once again speak more eloquently than he ever does vocally (91).

[33] By public here, I mean public in the context of this play – spoken aloud, communicated between two people. This desire for a shared moment with his father is not a desire for public communication at a larger communal level, though it has implications in that direction. A solid bond here would enable Gar with the rest of the community as well.

even have a chance to answer. Private even draws comic attention to the lack of communication during this discourse: by describing the repetitive nature of S.B.'s speech as "our nightly lesson in the English language" (48), by calling this one-sided discussion, "our little talk" (51), and by telling S.B. to be quiet, though he has been maddeningly silent, lest someone else becomes aware of "our secret" (51). Friel further underlines this "joke" by having Madge comment:

> The chatting in this place would deafen a body. Won't the house be quiet enough soon enough – long enough? (50)

She ironically comments on their public silence, but in a further structural irony the audience has experienced precious little silence; Private's ferocious chatting in the theatre would indeed "deafen a body." Similarly, shortly after, Madge re-enters and comments, "A body couldn't get a word in edgeways with you two!" (50) Once again Madge focuses attention on the actual public silence while the audience experiences Private's discourse. Indeed, in answer to Madge, Private immediately responds with a comment about her sense of humour. By doing so he immediately covers the silence which she is trying to point out. Friel's deliberate drawing attention to this dual theatrical level of discourse and silence, first through Private himself and then especially through Madge, reminds the audience of the nature of the trick, and the reality under the trick, at the same time as the audience experiences the trick. "Ironically...his eloquent deliveries can be heard only by the latter [Public Gar] so that the youth finds himself reduced to the same verbal isolation as his taciturn father" (Verstraete 87). Madge practically walks on and says directly to the audience, "Remember. It's really silent." So at the same time as the audience enjoys Private's clowning they are reminded of the price of that enjoyment.

At the beginning of Episode Three, following Gar's impassioned plea for communication at the end of the previous episode, Friel includes another scene dominated by both public silence and Private's speaking, another scene in which Private's communication only serves to underline the lack of communication. Once again here, Private moves from clowning (81-2) to a desire to publicly bond (82-3), this time by sharing what has become increasingly important to him throughout the play, a common memory. By the end of this scene, Private manages to push Public to take action, to publically communicate about this memory with his father. Unfortunately, the Canon's visit intervenes and more mundane public discourse again holds sway with Private reduced to mocking commentary. Elmer Andrews cites Harold Pinter on silence in his response to *Philadelphia*: "Speech...can be 'a stratagem to cover nakedness': 'There are two silences....One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is employed'" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 90). Andrews goes on to suggest that in *Philadelphia* Friel pursues Pinter's latter sense by showing how Private's "wonderfully vigorous and playful" eloquence is ultimately inadequate (90). But, using his dramatic split, Friel is able to convey both senses of this silence at once. There is no communication either through the public silence or through the furiously covering private speech. Private even once again draws attention to the lack of real communication for the audience by repeatedly mentioning a "chat" that they are all supposedly having but actually aren't (88).With this scene Friel reveals the public silence inherent in the supposed public discourse that does take place. This time during Private's speech the public figures of Gar, Madge, and S.B. are all actually speaking, they are saying the rosary, but the audience experiences it as "*barely distinct, a monotonous, somnolent drone*" (81). Friel suggests that even the larger public discourses that do exist, in this case religion, do so as rote repetitions of now meaningless droning sounds that no longer even qualify as words. Even public discourse is actually public silence. Private in this scene draws especial attention to the lack of help from the public discourse of religion in the person of the Canon, just as earlier the public discourse of education and especially literature was seen as barren in the person of the drunken and ineffectual Master Boyle:

> you're warm and kind and soft and sympathetic – all things to all men –...you could translate all this loneliness, this groping, this dreadful bloody buffoonery into Christian terms that will make life bearable for us all. And yet you don't say a word. Why Canon? Why arid Canon? Isn't this your job – to translate? Why don't you speak then? (88)

The call to speak underlines the lack of speech in this scene from the Canon. He hasn't come to help; he has come for tea and chess. The speech also underlines Private's own awareness of the nature of his clowning: at the core it is "dreadful bloody buffoonery." Nonetheless, Private immediately reverts to clowning to cover the awful truth of his own words.[34]

Having failed to secure help from the Canon he then turns to music to help him tell his story and functions as his own translator. But the music of course fails too. Private translates the music passionately enough, but it is only for the audience. S.B. cannot hear him, and the music is only yet another public discourse which Gar and his father do not share. Further, the impossibility of connection is emphasized by the staging. Public Gar is not even in the room during Private's speech. On the real level, silence must be complete. Indeed, the end of the scene, after Private's final plea and exit, illustrates the dominance of silence; first silence follows this exit, and then the Canon and S.B. have to strain to hear what eventually they identify as actually there, Gar's music. On the real level, they barely hear him and his "so-called" music, and their speech drones on (90).

Ultimately, the silent Stanislavskian world of the play dominates over the doubling trick despite the opposite seeming to be true. Yet, because of the doubleness, at the same time as the audience empathizes with the crushing claustrophobia of the situation, it is also made aware of the need to change it. Public silence does dominate. Even some public discourses are disguised silences. What discourse can defeat that? Who can translate between Private and Public?

Friel holds out Madge as a potential translator: one whom nobody uses, but one who translates for the audience. In *Contemporary Irish Drama* Roche points out that after the failed final attempt at communication between Gar and S.B. "only the audience in its privileged position can comprehend and set S.B.'s epiphany against Gar's and estimate the degree to which, however much the surface details might vary, the two memories are complementary in the feelings they honour" (101). But Madge reveals shortly afterwards that she too understands the men and aids the audience in its comparison:

---

[34] Citing David Krause on Irish comedy, Ferris suggests a subversive undermining of society through the comic in Irish literature which Friel repeats here (118). But Friel also reveals the cost of such a strategy. As Friel says of the play, "There is a lot of comedy in it. But it is according to Behan's technique of making the audience laugh and then saying something serious when they are thoroughly disarmed" (qtd. in Farleigh 49).

> Madge. When the boss was his [GAR's] age, he was the very same as him:
> leppin and eejitin' about and actin' the clown; as like as two peas.
> And when he's [GAR's] the age the boss is now, he'll turn out just
> the same. And although I won't be here to see it, you'll find that
> he's learned nothin' in-between times. (98)

Madge explains father and son, or translates them, in this monologue which is, ultimately, directly to the audience. Her earlier near meta-theatrical comments pointing out silence and noise have prepared us to hear her direct approach. Though the monologue could be performed as naturally as possible in response to the stimuli of her environment, as indicated by the stage directions (97-8), in the end the device of the monologue tends to break the fourth wall, to rupture the illusion of the play. It is at this point that the play most closely connects to the audience. By rupturing the fourth wall, the play closes the distance, and communicates wholly the "like as two peas" (98) natures of father and son, a communication which we implicitly believe. But, immediately after this connection, Gar's entrance returns the play to a world of illusion, of "Naturalism," a world which traps him in this theatrical space, unable to break the fourth wall, at an unbridgeable distance from the audience. However, by exposing and insisting on this distance, "Friel's theatre *does* translate...by making evident the gap between the realm of desire and that of necessity and by making that gap the object of our contemplation" (Welch 138).

Friel's use of space in the play supplements the dominant tendency towards stasis at the same time as it supplements the doubling in the play. Friel divides the upstage, over two-thirds of the total space, into naturalistic areas: the public kitchen and the private bedroom. The public/private division of space will echo and support the public/private division of character. At the beginning of the play, space and character seem completely naturalistic: the private bedroom is in darkness while the public kitchen area is lit at the same time that only Public Gar is on stage. Not until the lights come up on the private bedroom at the same time that Private Gar enters the play, does the division in character and space and in theatrical convention become apparent. Friel creates a Stanislavskian world by beginning with the slice of life public space and character. By presenting that space first, Friel prepares for a smooth natural transition, with the aid of lighting, to the private inner space and character as well, so that the private character seems as natural as the private space. The private character, like the lighting here, will merely illumine an interior psychological landscape. Yet, at the same time, the split in the staging also constantly echoes, visually, the split in the character; thus the audience sees the split as a jarring Brechtian alienation device which distorts Gar's "natural" wholeness. "Friel's decision to cut away all other areas of the house and present bedroom and kitchen in stark juxtaposition, adjoining each other from opposite sides of the stage, gives each a balanced significance that a fully realistic staging would not allow. The non-realistic presentation foregrounds the theatrical nature of what goes on in *both* locations" (Roche, *Contemporary* 81). Like the characters, the space supports the doubling trick while underlining the fact that it is a trick, that we are spectators in a theatre watching a performance of a slice of life and not life itself.

Moreover, as I am indebted to Anthony Roche for pointing out, in addition to providing naturalistic place settings, the kitchen and bedroom, also occupy certain positions with regards to, and speak back to, Irish theatrical traditions. Roche suggests that the kitchen has been the traditional Irish hearth familiar in Abbey theatre productions, and has become both archetypal and cliché (*Contemporary* 80). Friel places his play firmly in Irish theatrical tradition, but as he does with the kitchen, he places it off-centre.[35] Roche adds that the bedroom was a more threatening space in Irish theatre, indeed so threatening it was usually left off-stage and figured prominently in Irish literature rather than theatre. Here was the place of pleasure, particularly sexual, which was so proscribed in Ireland up until Friel's time (Contemporary 80-81). Friel places these two distinct traditions side-by-side, removing one from its central prominence and giving the other more central expression on stage. The spaces, and the baggage they represent, are in juxtaposition and in contradiction. A conflict, a split, of some sort is inevitable and enduring. Further, as Roche also points out, these spaces contain different styles of performance: Abbey traditionalism with "an archetypal cast of characters" in the kitchen; pop influenced performed fantasy scenes "derived from the media – not just cinema but radio...and television" in the bedroom (*Contemporary* 82). [36]

---

[35] Thomas Kilroy says of the play's off-centre connection to tradition that "part of the excitement for someone of my generation watching the first production of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* was in the recognition that a staple Irish formula was being reinvented before our eyes" ("Theatrical Text" 92-3). One might further add that if Richard Pine is right that the first production of *Philadelphia* marked Friel as "the father of contemporary Irish drama" ("Brian Friel and Contemporary Irish Drama" 190), then contemporary Irish drama itself strives to be off-centre.

> What the play therefore represents is a 'split' in its very staging no less than in its central character: between sanctioned forms of Irishness on the one hand, presided over by the patriarchal moulders of the mind, and on the other all those exotic 'foreign' influences that those figures had done so much to prohibit, condemn and anathematise in post-independence Ireland. (Roche, *Contemporary* 82)

Friel brings in yet another split for the audience, one between over-represented performances of Irishness and almost un-represented forms of Irishness. The barrier between performative styles will be temporarily breached, by Private Gar especially, but ultimately ineffectually.

The very separateness of the spaces also underlines the static nature of Gar's character: he will not reconcile private and public. Apart from Gar almost no one crosses the boundary from the public kitchen into the private bedroom. When Madge temporarily violates the inner sanctity, Gar, caught in the middle of a fantasy, hurriedly and embarrassedly rushes her out (46). Perhaps Friel is presenting another, this time visual, clue that Madge is the one who can cross boundaries, who can potentially translate, who can help to reconcile fantasy with reality, father with son, but that, as he will throughout, Gar fails to recognize the possibility in her. He will listen to her about his mother–who is, after all, only a fantasy to Gar, though he wishes her to be a memory–but he will not hear her translate the reality of his father to him.

---

[36] As Joe Dowling puts it, "What he did so brilliantly was, he took all these stock elements of the old Abbey Theater play–the father, son, housekeeper, priest, teacher–and then he turned up this extraordinary theatrical device of the private self. We'd never seen anything like it in the Irish theater before" (qtd. in Smith H5).

Friel adds one more space to his set which he describes as "fluid" (27). This fluid space in front of the other two spaces on a "generous apron" (27) is the memory space for the play. Here Friel intends for the memories to be acted out. It will be for example "a room in Senator Doogan's home" (27). As Roche points out, this space will be chronologically as well as spatially fluid (*Contemporary* 83). However, what Friel doesn't indicate here, and what Roche fails to notice, are the limitations of this supposedly fluid space. The *only* use for the space is in the above mentioned scene. It doesn't transform into anything else. The only other memory scene in the play, focussing on Lizzy's return, takes place in the kitchen. One might argue that this indicates that the sense of fluidity is seeping into the naturalistic space as well, but equally one might say that the dominance of the realistic kitchen is intruding on and limiting the theatrical possibilities of fluidity. Whatever the case, by the end of the play the naturalistic setting completely dominates space and character in a victory of stasis over fluidity. The action of the play shows us a character who is constantly leaving but who never physically does. Despite the knowledge that, after the end of the play, Gar is to go to Philadelphia, we now know that memory will trap him "right back where he started from." By the end of the play, far from being a fluid place of possibility, memory has become a static place of futility. Elmer Andrews would like to characterize Friel's use of space as "a free and fluid presentation" with a "flexible set" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 85), but, as Etherton notes, Friel's uses the third fluid space "rather timidly...and the characters tend to remain in their more naturalistically realised settings" (156). This character will never leave this space, these memories. "Gar ends the play plagued by agonizing indecision, as the barrenness of *both* his options...forces itself resoundingly to his attention" (Gleitman 234).

Time in the play also reinforces this sense of stasis. At one level *Philadelphia* seems to obey the tenets of the well-made play with respect to the neo-classical unities of time, place, and action: Gar is to leave the house where all events take place when the next morning arrives. But the neo-classical trinity will never be completed: Gar will not leave the place, nor will the time to leave ever arrive. "Causality, the essence of linear drama, is not welcome in the uneasy, tenuous land of this play" (Coakley 194). As he does with the split space, Friel deliberately calls attention to time throughout the play. The stage directions include "a large school-type clock" on the scullery or upstage wall constantly facing the audience. "Friel gives the schooltype clock–with its associations of insistent, man-made time . . .–the strong upstage centre position" (Burke, "'As If Language No Longer Existed'" 14). Friel foregrounds this clock by having Madge look at it in the first scene (30) and by having S.B. wind it near the end, a winding which ostentatiously includes checking his watch and consulting Public to check the time (83). From Madge's initial glance to S.B.'s winding, only two hours and thirty-five minutes have passed, but, as Roche notes, Friel plays with time by elongating it, by making this evening an awfully long and filled one, and by using memory scenes. He suggests that time becomes "more reel than real, filmic rather than actual" (*Contemporary* 102-03). If time does become more reel, it becomes the endlessly repeating reel of memory which Gar becomes increasingly trapped in. Indeed time seems like "school-time," endlessly elongated with the end of the day never coming. Friel deliberately chose a "school-type clock," which is especially relevant given his opinion of school as "an almost complete waste of time" ("Self-Portrait" 18); its implications, especially for a truant schoolboy character like Gar, suggest prison and release – except for the fact that release never comes on stage. We know he will go to Philadelphia, but we also know he is trapped by the past, trapped in this time.

As Lizzy notes of Gar and other Irish people in his situation, he is "Typical Irish! He will think about it! And while he's thinking about it the store falls in about his head" (63). Lizzy is prodding Gar to come to Philadelphia, but what she fails to realize is that Gar, like herself, will remain trapped in these thoughts of this place and time until it crumbles around his head, no matter where he is, unless he can find some means that enable him to move forward. The end of the play suggests that Gar fails to do so, and that, instead, he is caught in the "typical Irish" condition of stasis. Elmer Andrews describes Gar as "the same gormless ninny at the end as he was at the beginning" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 89), but he is not quite right. Gar is a different, and even worse off, "gormless ninny" at the end. His attempt to move forward by looking back, by claiming a factual past, has trapped him in that past much more thoroughly than his old fantasies of the future and past ever did. Gar used to have the capacity, as Neil Corcoran argues, to imaginatively remember the future (17). Now his desire for certain knowledge has left him uncertainly stuck in a paralysed present.

Staging *Lughnasa*; Un-Staging Ireland

If *Philadelphia* uses theatrical techniques to suggest how an unsalvageably split self inevitably leads action, place, and time to a state of stasis, then *Lughnasa* responds by using theatrical techniques to suggest possibilities for moving beyond or through stasis, while indicating ways to at least partially reconcile the self. Friel, now much more confident theatrically after an additional twenty-five years experience in the theatre, more wholly commits his artistic expression to overt theatricality in this latter play as well. As opposed to *Philadelphia*, which begins deliberately naturalistically before introducing its theatrical trick, *Lughnasa* begins in the more Brechtian manner of the memory play.[37] Initially, the lights focus on the narrator alone before they come up slowly on the rest of the cast frozen in tableau during his speech (1-2). With this initial lighting moment Friel stresses the unnaturalness of all on stage with the possible exception of the narrator himself. McMullan says that his "words give birth to the world of the play, evoking the 'original' act of creation..., and hinting that this is a play as much about the generation of narrative voice and artistic vision, as it is about dancing" (91).[38] The others seem part of his imagination or memory as he literally creates them from the darkness with his speech. At the same time the figures seem presented for our investigation in a frozen tableau. We are interested in them in the Stanislavskian sense: we want to know about them and their stories, but we also want to know, in a more Brechtian sense, why they are arranged as they are and why they are frozen for our inspection. "*Dancing at Lughnasa* begins, subverting normal theatrical expectations of dialogue and action, by giving us a narrator, a rather colourless figure, with the characters of his narrative frozen on stage in formal tableau" (Peacock and Devine 115). The narrator during this moment directly addresses the audience, introducing an episodic structure before the Stanislavskian naturalism begins to assert itself within the episodes and even within the narrator. David Grant says of Patrick Mason's premiere production of the play at the Abbey that "each character was firmly drawn in such a way as to fall between naturalism and the kind of theatrical boldness Mason has achieved so well before. The result was that the fullness of Friel's characters were given life, but we were always aware that we were seeing the action at one remove, through the mind of the narrator" (Pine, Grant, West 10). The episodic rather than climatic nature of the structure emphasizes another more Brechtian difference, one intrinsic to the structure of a memory play. Whereas *Philadelphia* primarily followed the unities of time, place, and action, and their cause and effect implications, albeit while also questioning them, *Lughnasa* jumps more radically from period to period with each scene being both introduced and distanced by the narrator. "On the technical level Friel's interruption of the narrative flow in *Lughnasa*, through Michael's announcements of the future histories of the characters, works as an alienation device, defying the audience's expectations of remaining within the time structure of the play" (Murray, "'Recording

---

[37] While, strictly speaking, the memory play genre is not Brechtian in origin, its use accomplishes some of the same purposes. When I use the term Brechtian here and elsewhere, I am referring to the deliberate creation of a distancing effect on the audience, an effect which causes the audience to think about the memories being enacted. Of course one might suggest, quite rightly, that such a distancing is an inherent part of the memory play sub-genre as it has been used by playwrights like Tennessee Williams. See especially Fintan O'Toole's detailed comparison of techniques in *Lughnasa* and *The Glass Menagerie* ("Marking Time" 208-11, 214). I think that such a suggestion would be quite justified, but I also think that Friel more deliberately calls attention to this effect than others do, and that such a calling attention creates a distance closer to a true Brechtian alienation. For further comparisons of Friel and Williams, see Murray, "'Recording Tremors'" 28-9; Pelletier and De Jong 132; Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel* 219; James P. and Mark C. Farrelly 107; Pine in Pine, Grant, West 7; and Grene, "Friel and Transparency 139. Grene also compares the play to Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (139) as does Krause, unflatteringly, in "Failed Words" (372).

---

[38] This technique of course is not new in Friel. In the next chapter, I discuss Frank Hardy calling the play into existence in *Faith Healer*.

Tremors'" 29). Within these scenes, and within the character of the narrator, Michael, *Lughnasa* is almost relentlessly Stanislavskian, but the episodic structure and presence of the narrator always remind the audience of the other level.

Even after the initial narration, when the play switches to the naturalistic episodes ushered by a deliberate change in lighting which underlines the difference, Friel includes deliberate reminders of the constructed theatricality of the piece. After a moment establishing the naturalism of the women working, Chris moves to look into a cracked mirror. The first lines of the first episode are about the mirror. While clearly this works as a bit of naturalistic stage business, it also serves to remind us of the nature of representation, particularly representation in this play or perhaps indeed any play. John Lahr notes "the first line of *Dancing at Lughnasa* is 'When are we going to get a decent mirror to see ourselves in?' The play provides such a mirror" ("In *Dancing at Lughnasa*" 216). But if plays and actors are in Hamlet's famous line "to hold the mirror up to nature" (III, ii, 16), then Friel suggests, here at least if not more generally, that these representations are skewed, that the mirror is cracked. The mirror may also suggest the distortion of event caused by the reflection of memory.[39] Although, if O'Toole is right about "the tension at the heart of theatre itself" ("Marking Time" 212) , then, in a sense, all plays must inevitably be memory plays–capturing (and distorting?) moments frozen in time.

Shortly after the mirror reference, Rose dances and sings, and Maggie comments, "You should be on the stage, Rose" (3). Of course, she already is. Soon after that, to underline this point, both Maggie and Rose dance and claim that they should be on the stage (4). Though these incidents do not break the boundaries of naturalistic playing, the continuing comments draw attention to that playing. Also starting near the beginning (4), Friel introduces the device of the radio which will turn on and off seemingly at random, controlling the characters' actions. The device calls attention to itself: the music turns on and off too conveniently to be entirely naturalistic.

---

[39] Anna McMullan notes that "mirror and window references throughout the spoken text introduce a motif of incomplete and distorting views, a failure to see the whole picture" (98). Cassandra Fusco goes so far as to claim that "on a literal level the women's virtual presence is fractured and distorted as reflected by the household's small, cracked mirror" and that as a "nonverbal...device...it shows that the women's positions are fissured, unnaturally altered, multiplied and fragmented" (111-12). Fusco (122 n.17) and Murray ("'Recording Tremors'" 32) both point out the importance of mirrors, and particularly cracked mirrors, for writers in the Irish literary tradition such as Synge, Heaney and Joyce. Murray notes that such self-reflexiveness in the text helps to theatrically dislodge it "from realism" (32).

Most importantly, Friel includes the device of the split narrator/invisible boy which both furthers Stanislavskian illusions of identity and circumstance and exposes them. Friel outlines the theatrical use of this device in his stage directions early in the play:

> *The convention must now be established that the (imaginary)* BOY MICHAEL *is working at the kite materials lying on the ground. No dialogue with the* BOY MICHAEL *must ever be addressed to adult* MICHAEL, *the narrator. Here for example,* MAGGIE *has her back to the narrator.* MICHAEL *responds to Maggie in his ordinary narrator's voice.* (7)

Established at this early point, the split in the narrator/boy resembles the split Public/Private Gar from *Philadelphia*.[40] In both cases, the other characters can only see the Public side of the character. In the latter case, ironically, the public visible character that they see is invisible to the audience. Now the "private" figure speaks literally through the other's mouth and in his own voice. In addition, the split is much less pronounced, with the "public" Boy Michael having much less autonomy. The boy's words and actions, as revealed by the narrator speaking through him and his lack of a corporal body of his own, come directly from the narrator, from the adult Michael. Anna McMullan argues that even within the naturalistic scenes the boy's missing body is "a device which maintains the dual perspective of memory, both absent and present, then and now, real and imagined, originating yet 'other'" (91). And Elmer Andrews suggests that "by including Michael as narrator, Friel emphasises the constructed conditions of life" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 219). The Boy Michael's adult voice and disembodied absent presence serve to remind the audience that even while we watch the naturalistic journeys of the characters, especially as they interact with Michael, these characters have less wholeness than the split narrator himself. Of all the characters adult Michael is the only one actually present. The others, like the invisible, inaudible Boy Michael, remain under the narrator's control, in the narrator's memory.

---

[40] Richard Pine also compares these opening descriptions (*Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 226).

And the narrator, through this device, is, in the words of Christopher Murray, both "involved and detached" ("'Recording Tremors'" 32). Regarding the premiere production at the Abbey, David Grant says, "The greatest challenge fell to Gerard McSorley as Michael. He had to say the lines of the infant and non-existent self so as to maintain the flow of the scene, but without actually involving himself in it" (Pine, Grant, West 11). Richard Tillinghast notes how both costume and accent served to further distance Michael: "It was clear both from his dress and his accent that he had come some distance from his upbringing in Donegal" (36).

> The *Philadelphia* idea is reversed. Whereas in the earlier work Private Gar lives inside Public Gar's imagination and is able to comment on the 'real' action, in *Dancing at Lughnasa* the narrator Michael, whose mother, father and aunts people the play, inhabits the real world with his audience and looks in on the action with us. This reversal serves to underline the unreality of the characters before us and has fundamental implications for the production. (Grant in Pine, Grant, West 9)

Primarily using the absence and presence of the split Michael, Friel gives the audience lessons in perception, about accepting what they see at face value, about the accepting of conventions in the viewing of theatre. From the beginning of the play the audience can never be sure whether Boy Michael is on or not. Near the end Chris says, "Nobody can vanish quicker than that Michael fellow when you need him" (62). Yet how does the audience know that Boy Michael has left? At times it seems that the entrances and exits of adult Michael serve to indicate the presence or absence of Boy Michael, but adult Michael comes on, or stays on for narrative moments even when Boy Michael should no longer be "on stage"; at other times adult Michael only comes on for moments of Boy

Michael's speech and then leaves, with the question of Boy Michael's continued absence or presence unresolved. The audience can never quite be sure about this convention. It is established early as Friel indicates, but it also varies. We accept the device, but continued shifts make us aware of the device.[41]

Friel uses two particular visible/invisible moments to remind the audience of the potentially illusory nature of what they see. The invisible boy causes Maggie to scream and leap in terror (8), only to reveal that there is in fact no mouse to be afraid of. Later Maggie tricks the invisible boy with an invisible bird. "Don't you know what it was? It was all in your mind" (14-15). But whose mind and to what extent? How can we judge whether or not the rat or bird exist, seeing that we have to accept the invisible, inaudible boy as existing? We are tricked along with Maggie, along with the boy, and this reminds us of the larger tricks of the play, a play that exists primarily in the narrator's mind and through our direct connection with him in our minds. We accept the conventions with our "willing suspension of disbelief" to construct the total reality of the world of the play in our minds, but Friel reminds us of the acceptance of those conventions. "We are warned not to trust what we think we see" (McMullan 98). We are invited into the world of the play and to judge the world of the play. We are invited to feel, but also to think. Ultimately we are invited into a single perception, and to judge that perception. These reminders of convention together with the structure of the play reveal to the audience that Michael perceives and constructs the reality we see. The Brechtian narrator is, at the end, the only Stanislavskian character on stage. The world of the play collapses into the world of his mind, yet paradoxically the world of the play remains visible to the audience as well. The advantages of the Stanislavskian emotional connection generated in the audience for the characters of the play now accrue to the narrator. At the same time he has the Brechtian advantage of the direct intellectual connection and distance gained through narration. His mind remains open to inspection through the world of the play, open to perception and perhaps open to possibility. Certainly, unlike in *Philadelphia*, the protagonist of *Lughnasa* controls his memories at least to some extent rather than having memories control him. The world of *Lughnasa* collapses into the narrator, who is mobile and self-contained. In the earlier play the world, the memories expand to consume the protagonist who is immobilized and split in two. Madge in *Philadelphia* makes a tentative connection to the audience across the gap of the fourth wall, only to have the world of the play reinscribe its illusionistic authority. *Lughnasa* produces, at least briefly, an almost complete interconnectedness as it leaps over the barrier between audience and performance.

---

[41] Clutterbuck argues that the invisible boy functions as the absent/present controlling narrator and patriarch, suggesting that his moments off stage are the times when "the women...successfully threaten...[the] control of [the] narrator" (113). But how do we know when he is off stage? His control may be either more total or nowhere near as secure as she suggests. Friel refuses to let us know. "There is a tension between the omniscience of Michael's narrative and the play's insistence on the lack of a clear picture" (McMullan 98).

As with *Philadelphia,* Friel uses theatrical space and time to complement the main thrust of the play; only in *Lughnasa,* rather than expanding into a consuming and debilitating stasis, space and time collapse, as does the world of the play, into a single yet imaginative individual who has direct theatrical ties to the collective mind and who holds the promise of possible fluidity. "Reintegration is possible only in the mind, in imagination, specifically in the collective mind of the audience as influenced by the narrator" (Murray, "'Recording Tremors'" 37). All the reminders of dual levels of theatrical technique have prepared the audience for the final, paradoxically promising, collapse in the last moment of the play. At the end, the play is juxtaposed between the sweet Stanislavskian enacted memories of life before the industrial fall and the Brechtian distancing provided by adult Michael's bitter prognosis for the future. "The pastness of the past, the knowledge given to the audience of how the stories ended, bears down on the stage life of the present....This implacable narrative is almost unbearable in the theatre as it is juxtaposed with the immediacy of the characters living in a spontaneous present, innocent of their own terrible future" (Grene, "Truth and Indeterminacy" 18-19).[42] Yet the constant slippage between levels, as indeed between spaces and times, has prepared the audience for a slippage to another level, one that incorporates and goes beyond the theatrical split as it goes beyond time and space in the play.

---

[42] Anna McMullan (95-6), F.C. McGrath (*Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 244), Elmer Andrews (*The Art of Brian Friel* 232-3), and Shaun Richards ("Placed Identities" 61) all comment on the importance and effect of this bittersweet split. Martine Pelletier and Perro de Jong particularly note the "the uneasy balance between humour and pathos, between comedy and tragedy is miraculously kept until the end" (134).

For most of the play the dominant naturalistic level has been the enacted memories of the Mundy sisters in 1936 in Donegal, whereas the narrator has constantly been the least naturalistic character, either in delivering his narration directly to the audience or in interacting with the others through the proxy of the invisible boy with the adult voice. At the end of the play, after establishing the bittersweet juxtaposition between the enacted events of 1936 and the narrated events of the future of these characters, the narrator curiously becomes the most, indeed the sole naturalistic character in the play. His final memory of 1936, one which "owes nothing to fact" (71), reminds the audience of his solitary status. The other characters, once again, form the tableau the audience saw at the beginning, though with some few changes.[43] In essence, they have always been in tableau, being moved around now and then by the memories of the watching invisible boy, there for his and our investigation. We may realize now that those outside were always destined to leave the house (including the invisible boy whose presence outside is indicated by the kites)[44] while those inside will never get to leave, that Friel and Michael are giving away the ending from the beginning. Further, the lights move to a soft golden (almost) haze around this tableau (70), emphasizing, as with the lights at the beginning that brought the narrator's memories to life, that the characters are memory constructs as much as

---

Clutterbuck further adds that Michael's sweet memory comes at the bitter cost of the women's own 'real' voices (116).

[43] For further critiques of the opening and closing tableaus, and the changes between them, see Elmer Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel* 232-4; Peacock and Devine 121-2; Clutterbuck 112; and Murray, "'Recording Tremors'" 37.

[44] Some also argue that the kites represent another face of Michael from the one we see, and the one we imagine, a disturbing one related to the pagan, the Dionysian, the primitive. See Elmer Andrews *The Art of Brian Friel* 230–31, 232; McMullan 97, 99; McGrath, *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 240; Pelletier and de Jong 134; Burke, "'As If Language No Longer Existed'" 19; and Joan E. Robbins 85.

individual entities. The music which accompanies this final moment no longer comes from Marconi, but from off stage, from out of nowhere. Or, rather like the memory itself, from out of the narrator's mind. His mind now controls the entire theatrical space openly, as it has surreptitiously from the beginning. The other characters now sway imperceptibly at his command; the music and lights obey his injunctions. The stage, the whole play, has become this journey to the core of the narrator's most important memory, to the core of the narrator's character. Ultimately this play is about what forms him. How does he, in a very Stanislavskian manner, exist as a complete well-rounded living human being? The others, now clearly his constructs, serve to illustrate the natural workings of this one being, this one natural mind.

Spatially, as indicated in the stage directions at the outset, the completely naturalistic kitchen and garden make up the entire set. The split here between indoors and outdoors appears to echo the public kitchen/private bedroom split of *Philadelphia*. It is in a sense another "kitchen" play in the Abbey tradition, but by the end of the latter play it is the third space, the fluid memory space which dominates.[45] In *Lughnasa* Friel creates no particular space for the narrator, just a pool of light downstage left, while in *Philadelphia* this fluid memory space comprised nearly one third of the space. Yet in the latter this "no-space" spreads to encompass all. Naturalistic space has dominated throughout the play, but at the end–indicated by the near hazy lights, which recall the hailing characters from the darkness at the beginning of the play, and the frozen yet swaying tableau–static space answers to the narrator's thoughts: "*And as* MICHAEL *continues everybody sways very slightly from side to side–even the grinning kites. The movement is so minimal that we*

---

[45] Both Roche ("Friel and Synge" 156-7) and Fusco (110) note the importance of an inside/outside split and what the two symbolize in terms of constrained domesticity and natural anarchy.

Concerning the play in production, Derek West notes in his review of the original the importance of elevating "the firmly naturalistic...detail" (Pine, Grant, West 11) into a more symbolic atmosphere. Peacock and Devine note at some length the dominant symbolism of poppies amongst the harvest beside the kitchen set in the premiere production (presumably with Friel's approval) which made both the naturalism and its unsettling visually clear (114).

cannot be quite certain if it is happening or if we imagine it" (71) The seemingly fixed naturalistic space literally moves with the possibility of fluidity, of moving beyond stasis. The collapsed naturalistic space re-expands as a fluid memory space, natural in its own way, incorporating Michael's constructions.

Temporally, the play seemingly takes part in 1936, but the existence of the narrator and his knowledge of the "future" ensure that in the end the seemingly out-of-time narrator is the only one living in naturalistic time at all. While the narrator in particular seems to have no temporal ties, the cyclical repetitiveness of the scenes of the women working, of dancing, of Gerry's occasional returns suggests a sort of endless present quality for those in1936 as well. At the same time the presence of the narrator and the hints of trouble in the 1936 present also suggest an onrush of time. Kate rightly forecasts, "suddenly, suddenly you realize that hair cracks are appearing everywhere; that control is slipping away; that the whole thing is so fragile it can't be held together much longer. It's all about to collapse" (35). And of course it will collapse. The only real questions are what lies beyond the collapse, what can be taken or learned from it? As Fintan O'Toole suggests the split nature of time in the play is caught between the beautiful captured frozen and dead past and the relentless onset of time which will wipe away that beauty. Yet, as I have suggested, Friel sidesteps that contradiction at the end of the play: Michael in the final speech moves beyond the splits or divides into a place out of time, remembering a time which he acknowledges did not exist. Thus time from the narrative position, as with space, is undefined but ultimately dominant. We are brought back to the viewpoint of the narrator, the only one whose future is naturalistically unknown and unfixed, the one who moves at the end of the play outside time into an enabling memory.

Many critics and reviewers have responded positively to the enabling potential in the play's final "memory." Seamus Heaney lauds it for being a constructed personal truth despite the facts (235). Helen Lojek calls it "one of Friel's most positive images of full communication and communion" (88). Elmer Andrews says, "The almost imperceptible fluidity of the play's closing tableau is a celebration of the power of theatre to renew and reveal, and a rejection of 'fossilised' history" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 234). And Richard

Pine commends Friel for writing this "emotional epiphany" which provides hope in the form of Michael's "arrival at an unambiguous self that can proceed outwards to meet the world" ("Yeats, Friel" 171). Katharine Worth believes that "the golden view prevails. Despite the dark shadows cast by unnerving cultural change, adult Michael's closing memory... is...so alluring and so mesmeric that 'everybody seems to be floating'. It is a memory that 'owes nothing to fact' (*DL* 71), he says. Perhaps, rather, it transcends fact. It is an 'enabling' memory" (86-7). However, Catriona Clutterbuck finds that the dark cultural shadows still overlay the final moment. She questions the cost to the women of Michael's enabling moment: "*Dancing at Lughnasa* records how its protagonist's voice has been enabled, albeit in a highly limited form, at the cost of women's voices" (110).

Clutterbuck raises here the recurring issues with Friel concerning his representations of women. Even if his women characters are compelling and complete, and some would not say that they are, they are still women from the point of view of a man. Of *Lughnasa*, Joan E. Robbins says, "Friel's view is sympathetic but incomplete; it reflects the plight of Irish woman according to a man" (85). Anna McMullan notes that particularly "with *Dancing at Lughnasa* Friel has created a largely female environment, although that environment is evoked through the memory of the narrator, Michael" (90). Claudia W. Harris pushes this idea farther, claiming that Michael's gaze is also Friel's gaze and the male gaze, there not to represent the women as much as to limit those representations (44-9).[46] Anthony Roche suggests that "Michael's ambivalent position could be read as Friel's acknowledgement that, for all the play's emphasis on women, it is being authored by a man" (*Contemporary* 285). Nevertheless, female actors, such as Bríd Ní Neachtain, who played Rose in the original production, believe that "Brian writes very well for women" (qtd.in Wolf, "A Five-Sister Play" 11). The positive response to the women in this play and in particular to their dancing, by those viewing and those performing them, suggests that rather than merely limiting and ultimately controlling the women, as Harris suggests, Friel uses, as Clutterbuck argues, "a controlling narrative device and a female-dominated cast [to] strenuously challenge each other in a way that liberates the Irish writer into the renewed possibility of political engagement" (103). She notes, following Christopher Murray, that

---

[46] To do so she draws on Laura Mulvey on the male gaze in film (Claudia W. Harris 47-8), but she fails to sufficiently account for the difference between the media (as she later will with novels and plays (49)). The medium of theatre gives up control even as it tries to assert it.

> Michael is not the same as Friel. Far from himself curtailing the female voice, Friel links the debate on individuation directly to the need for women to speak, by deliberately having that speech circumscribed by a male narrator who stands to the side of the stage throughout the action. Indeed all the male characters of the play occupy this detached location from which they control the contours of the five sisters' lives. (104)[47]

Neither is Michael a trouble free example of a fully integrated functioning member of society, of a triumphant male. Michael like Gar seems to replay memory over and over. Indeed, the positive final memory is the one "that visits [him] most often" (71). He too has gone away only to return to Ballybeg, constantly, in memory. He too remains resolutely indecisive: "My mother never knew of that letter. I decided to tell her–decided not to–vacillated for years as my father would have done; and eventually, rightly or wrongly, kept the information to myself" (61).[48] The contents of the letter which he will not reveal alludes to another split in his existence. There is another Michael Evans, another son of the same father, age, and name. Further, there is a substantial split in the structure of the play. For a character who is ultimately the protagonist, Michael, unlike Gar, spends a great deal of time off stage. Yet Michael is still a much more whole, much more integrated personality than Gar. Michael can return home and accept his past rather than be disabled by it. In fact his lack of stage time may be indicative of that wholeness. Michael does not have such a yearning need to connect, to communicate; Michael has achieved some measure of peace and reconciliation with these memories. He can for the most part simply allow them to exist. Some even exist beyond his control. In his most enabling memory he fuses the others' movements, and controls the lights and sound; nonetheless, "*during* MICHAEL'S *speech KATE cries quietly*" (70). In Friel there will be no simple and complete transcendence of memory, of the past; it will always be complicated, juxtaposed, bittersweet. "The play ends with an ellipsis. A maybe" (Susan C. Harris 37).

---

[47] In *Molly Sweeney* Friel will literally circumscribe the female by having two male characters on either side of the main character as they all fight to construct her story, her identity. I will discuss Friel's explorations of the potential damage done by the author, particularly by men representing women, when I discuss this play in the next chapter.

[48] He also remains alone. Clutterbuck finds that "the saddest thing about Michael as narrator is his isolation under his self-appointed spotlight" (117).

Playing Irish: Playing Against Type

Still another theatrical element, one that I have called performativity, works in both plays to potentially transcend or to subvert them. This performativity works on two levels: one not particularly from the Irish theatrical tradition – physical expressiveness; one particularly descended from Irish stage tradition – verbal eloquence. On the physical level, *Philadelphia,* as Anthony Roche has suggested (*Contemporary* 82), particularly in the private bedroom and through the split protagonist, is able to bring foreign performative influences onto the stage. Primarily at Private Gar's instigation, Public Gar acts out physically the fantasies inspired by the media: movies, television, radio, and records. He begins this play with a certain public performative bravura, singing his first on stage lines, and, in his first on stage action, forcing Madge to waltz (29). Public and Private Gar begin with a strong, enjoyable, contagious physical performativity, but such performativity falters over time.[49] Roche suggests that "in the early stages of the play the fantasy scenes work as almost pure unmitigated relief for both Gar and the audience" (90). Gar even dances in one fantasy with the same sort of abandon and to the same sort of ceili music as the sisters do in *Lughnasa* (*Philadelphia* 38). But, at this same moment, Private prods Public to remember the realities of his life such as his failure with Katie Doogan that these fantasies are designed to escape. Forced to confront this memory, the dancing stops. Increasingly, the realities of Gar's situation put the damper on his fantasy, on his performativity. By the end of Episode One, Public Gar merely stands motionless while Private Gar has to prod him to "*sing limply*" (55). He "cannot sustain the boisterous mood" (Maxwell, "'Figures in a Peepshow'" 53). Nearer to the end of the play, Private Gar's physical antics seem a more and more forced response to failure, particularly failure to communicate. After he delivers his tirade on translation to the inevitably deaf ears of the Canon, Private tries to make light of his own words and the seriousness of the moment by "*dancing around, singing to the tune of "Daisy"*: "Screwballs, Screwballs, give me your answer do. I'm half crazy all for the love of you" (88). Unfortunately for Gar, the failure to communicate has literally in the form of the two Gars left him "half crazy," and so the comedy loses its comedic edge and merely reinforces its opposite.[50] Finally, by the end of the play, Gar neither sings nor dances as the physicality peters out along with Gar's eloquence: both physical and verbal are ultimately neutered.

---

[49] Gleitman provides a detailed list of his role-playing performances as well as noting Gar's increasingly "desperate play" (233-4).

In contrast, the non-Irish physical performativity of the dance in *Dancing at Lughnasa* manages to surpass traditional Irish verbal eloquence. As Brian Singleton notes, "When Friel wrote the dance sequence in *Dancing At Lughnasa* he did more than just permit a paganistic release from social, economic, familial and psychological entrapment for women. He allowed a group of actors to communicate solely through their bodies" (n.pag.).[51] Julie Kavanagh enlists the support of Rosaleen Linehan, who played Kate in the

---

[50] Both Andrews (*The Art of Brian Friel* 90-91) and Verstraete (86) comment on the failure of Gar's performative strategy.

[51] Many critics have commented on the inclusion of the body in *Lughnasa*. Shaun Richards, following Helen Gilbert, argues, "dance in drama 'offers a site of resistance to the hegemonic discourses through its representation of the body on stage as a moving subject'" ("Placed Identities" 62). McMullan's article, "'In Touch with Some Otherness'": Gender, Authority, and the Body in *Dancing at Lughnasa*," explores at length the possibility of the body as a site of resistance to the dominant patriarchal order. See also Fusco, "The Dancer or the Dance?" 110, 113-4; Claudia W. Harris, "The Engendered Space"; Andrews' chapter "Body" in *The Art of Brian Friel*; and Clutterbuck, "*Lughnasa* After *Easter*" 108-9. Harris is probably too begrudging to Friel, giving all the credit for resistance to the actresses dancing the parts, while Andrews certainly goes too far in suggesting that Friel creates or provides the body as an essentially feminine speech. Clutterbuck, rightly I think, tempers both their views, seeing Friel's move with the body as being typically assertive and subversive (103, 108-9).

London and New York premieres of the play, to describe this dance moment as *the moment* in which the play captures or enthrals the audience (130). My own experience and the experiences of those I talked to after a production of this play confirms this insight.[52]

What this moment injects into the working routine of the house, and hence to the audience, is some desperately needed pagan energy. The mention of the pagan Lughnasa festival and harvest dance inspires the moment. The dancing starts and stops prodded in part by the godlike Marconi. Friel even describes the play as "about the necessity for paganism" (qtd. in Kavanagh 134). As Susan C. Harris says of the moment, "This is not just a dance; it is the Maenad's frenzy" (34).

Like Harris, many critics have identified the influence of the Dionysian, or one might say the Lughnasian, within the play. F.C. McGrath goes so far as to call his chapter on the play, "Dionysus in Ballybeg" (*Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 235-47). McGrath feels that Friel includes Dionysus in the play through a representative character, Michael's father Gerry (241-3).[53] Peacock and Devine suggest that he could be, similarly, a representative of Lugh in the play (121). McGrath also sees the radio, Marconi, as a "Dionysus or Pan figure" (236). Peacock and Devine in turn describe the radio as influencing the action so strongly that it "becomes, in effect, an extra character in the play" (116). And Susan C. Harris adds that the initial impulse to name that character Lugh was not a bad idea (36) because the radio functions with the power of the divine, the magical, the inspirational. The radio becomes the god in the play: a literal rendering of the *deus ex machina*, a *deus ex Marconi*.

McGrath claims that "the Dionysian keeps erupting in various forms" in the play

---

[52] Most reviewers also felt the performative strength of this moment. See an extensive list of reviewers' comments in Claudia W. Harris' "The Engendered Space" (45-6). Harris herself calls this "an instance of pure theatre" (43). Terence Brown says that "in the Abbey performance this was a moment of unambiguous joy for actors and audience alike" (200). For other similar responses see also Pelletier and de Jong 131, Worth 86, Gleitman 237, Murray, "'Recording Tremors'" 36, and McGrath, *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 237.

[53] Fusco too feels that Gerry represents the "Dionysiac spirit" (112).

(*Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 235), but perhaps the play itself is a Dionysian eruption, a fulfilling of the pagan ritual it calls for. One of Lugh's functions was to inspire a creative fecundity that could result in new life or new art.[54] Murray lists a summary of the pagan rites of Lughnasa from Maire Mac Neill's *The Festival of Lughnasa*. Those ceremonies include: "a ritual dance-play perhaps telling of a struggle for a goddess and a ritual fight; an installation of a head on top of the hill and a triumphing over it by an actor impersonating Lugh; another play representing the confinement by Lugh of the monster blight or famine" ("Recording Tremors'" 35). The origins of Greek drama are not that different. The Athenians celebrated the inspirations of Dionysus at festivals which centred on the ceremony or ritual of theatre.[55] Elmer Andrews (*The Art of Brian Friel* 228), Cassandra Fusco (119), Pelletier and de Jong (131-2), and especially Susan C. Harris, in her whole article on the power of ritual in Friel, cite the importance of the ceremonial, the ritualistic in *Lughnasa* and of the play itself as such a ritual. Harris suggests that the dance is not enough because "the Bacchic frenzy is only one stage of the ritual catharsis that would constructively integrate the powers of the earth into the human social world" (34). And Murray describes the sisters as "Bacchanalians in search of their Dionysus" ("'Recording Tremors'" 36). The sisters may not find their Dionysus, but the audience for the play may. With the ritualistic ending which recalls the dance Friel calls for a constructive reintegration using the ceremony of theatre.

Still, David Krause contends that the dance too easily functions as a symbol of performative hope:

> That wild dance, which exhilarates the audience as well as the aunts,

---

[54] Elmer Andrews (*The Art of Brian Friel* 227) and Cassandra Fusco (123 n.19) both note that Lugh was the god of arts and crafts.

[55] And Friel's theatre also continues such a tradition in the Irish theatre, particularly at the Abbey, itself a conscious attempt to mimic the Greek theatre practice. For comparisons of Friel and Synge in particular and the need for the pagan within their work, see Ferris 131-2; Grene, "Truth and Indeterminacy" 19; Roche, "Friel and Synge" 155; Elmer Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel* 227. Clearly as well, there is both a use of, and a cry for, pagan energy in many of O'Casey's works.

> becomes the central and perhaps too easily earned symbol of the play....It is a memorable moment, and while it is enough to sustain Michael's haunted nostalgia, it cannot entirely encourage us to overlook the morbid or hard moments that run through the play, the collapse of the family and the tragic death of the two aunts. It is a commonplace emblem of romantic poetry, often parodied for its oversimplified sentimentality, that love conquers all, *amor vincit omnia*. Are we now to take comfort from the Lughnasa emblem that dance conquers all, *saltatio vincit omnia*? Perhaps not, happy lovers and dancers might reply, but it feels so good. Feeling is all? ("Failed Words" 369)

The answer to Krause is: of course not. The point of the play lies in the balance between the joy generated by the dance in contrast to the "hard moments that run through the play."

To guard against readings that don't consider this balance, Friel subverts the symbol of the dance at the same time as he employs it. During the dance, "*there is a sense of order being consciously subverted*" (22).[56] To create this subversion, a subversion of traditional Irish theatrical form as well according to Singleton, Friel uses very traditional Irish dance music played by a ceili band and a dance which, at the very least, resembles traditional Irish dancing. In order to reach beyond traditional Irish theatrical practice, Friel draws upon other traditional Irish forms. He creates a pagan subversion of then contemporary Irish culture (at a particularly hidebound period in the country's history) by appealing to traditional Irish cultural forms, while at the same time subverting those traditional forms by making them into a "*parodic reel*" with dancers "*crudely caricaturing*" themselves (22). Friel is aware that song and dance can be seen as simply another version of the traditional Irish eloquence, a physical and musical blarney: the phenomenon of the biggest current Irish cultural export, *Riverdance*, illustrates this possibility. The appeal to other Irish forms is not sufficient in itself: there is no simple answer.

---

[56] Many critics who comment on the joy inspired by the performative moment of the dance also mention the textual subversion of it and the importance of such a balance. See Brown 200; Worth 86; Shaun Richards, "Placed Identities" 62-3; McMullan 93-4; and Susan C. Harris 33-4.

The play also includes a great deal of more "civilized" dancing, particularly the dances between Gerry and Chris and Gerry and Agnes. These contemporary civilized dances have a foreign origin. Like the dances and singing in *Philadelphia,* they originate outside insular Ireland, carried by the magic of the media, in this play literally the magic of the radio waves. The main dancing scenes also originate outside the insular house as it is the foreign Gerry who initiates these sequences. The descriptions in the play suggest the lovely, measured, and skilled nature of this foreign civilized dancing, but this dance too has some pagan roots. The *deus ex Marconi* also inspires and ends these dances. The song sung by Gerry, notably with Agnes, is "Anything Goes," Cole Porter's (then topical) ode to liberation from social mores. When discussing the pagan rituals in Ryanga, Father Jack notes how the dance and the ceremony imperceptibly slips from religious to secular (48).[57] Dance in this play tends to slip between religious and secular, pagan and civilized, Irish and foreign. Such a tendency culminates in the "marriage ceremony" between Gerry and Chris. They marry in a silent dance, a secular dance with pagan religious connotations. Yet we never see this moment. We only hear it described by Michael. The description of the dance, combined with Jack's pagan pounding of sticks beneath the narration, combines the pagan and the civilized once more; it also combines the words with the dance.

By the end of the play, language surrenders to, merges with, dance in a wordless ceremony, but one, paradoxically, described in words: "Dancing as if language had surrendered to movement–as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony was now the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness" (71). Through this merging, which recalls all the dance in the play, the pagan now resides inside the civilized, dance in language or language in dance, but the minimal movement of the actors, especially in contrast to the quantity of the narrator's words, suggests the minimal, contained, tenuous nature of that paganism. Moreover, words like "as if" emphasize the unrealized nature of this merger: such a potentially powerful memory retains a dream quality, accentuated by lights and music, particularly in contrast to the bitter reality of the previous narration. Nevertheless, even in this highly qualified space, Friel creates some movement. Vladimir and Estragon may not move forward, but perhaps they might, as the dancers do here, sway slightly sideways. In response to Irish theatrical tradition, Friel himself might sway slightly sideways by incorporating the physical into the verbal. As he says, "When you come to the large elements and mysteries of life...they are ineffable. Words fail us at moments of great emotion. Language has become depleted for me in some way; words have lost their accuracy and precision. So I use dance in the play as a surrogate for language" (qtd. in Kavanagh 130). However, such a surrogate would not exist without the contrast with Friel's words. His language leads us to the edge, the dance jumps into the abyss, past the footlights and attempts direct communication. Despite Friel's emphasis on physical possibilities, he remains primarily a playwright in the Irish tradition of eloquence. Even performativity in his plays leans heavily to the Irish tradition of performative eloquence rather than physical. "Brilliance in the theatre has, for Irish dramatists, been linguistic. Formally, the Irish theatrical tradition has not been highly experimental. It depends almost exclusively on talk, on language" (Deane, "Introduction" 12). Friel loads *Philadelphia* with such eloquence through Gar's clowning talk. Yet the revelation that eloquence serves to cover a fear of silence suggests an emptiness under all the talk, a close association with failure. Unsurprisingly, Friel moves from this view of language being associated with failure to doubting the efficacy of language at all by the time he writes *Lughnasa*. Even as early in his career as the end of *Philadelphia*, Friel had shown that such eloquence led only to stammered denials of knowledge of identity, of self and place. As Ginette Verstraete notes of Friel more generally, "the frequent hesitations and stammerings of the speaker [help] to [reveal] Friel's concern with language as cover, distortion, mental colonialism and so forth." (85)

---

[57] For more detailed comparisons of Ballybeg and Ryanga see Murray's "'Recording Tremors'"; McGrath's "Dionysus in Ballybeg" in *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama*; Brown's "'Have We a Context'"; Harris' "Don the Robes and Taste Real Power"; Peacock and Devine's "'In Touch With Some Otherness"; and Fusco's "The Dancer or the Dance?"

In *Lughnasa* Friel moves beyond the mere failure of eloquence to suggest the possibilities inherent in a more physical, dramatic communication. At the same time that

Friel elevates movement, he does it in conjunction with words and so revitalizes eloquence. Friel's achievement in *Lughnasa* represents a kind of crippled transcendence, one beyond language yet created by language. It can only exist with the support of a bitter juxtaposition; the characters in this memory are beyond death, but they are dead. Indeed, the lack of this bitter juxtaposition of hope and despair undermines the attempt to transfer Friel's work from stage to screen. With a diminished narrative role and with dance not nearly powerful enough to take over from language, the movie contains no clear juxtaposition of hope and despair and no dance to take over from it either. Instead, the more realistic sadder elements prevail, creating a well-observed, primarily linear story of hardship in rural Ireland; but it does not move much beyond that. Indeed, one could argue that, especially without the balance of the theatrical devices, the movie becomes another export of eloquent rural Irishness.[58]

"Ah Sure. It's Only a Charmin' Wee Play"

If a staged performance misses the dramatic balance, this perception can be a response to the plays as well, with performativity in particular being a double-edged sword. In *Philadelphia*, Friel creates Gar as a deliberate reworking of the stage Irishman, but he suggests that, in intolerable conditions, such eloquence only exists as a defence mechanism. Gar takes refuge in the false hope of fantasy, takes eloquent joy from despair, but the underlying reality stresses silence, the lack of communication and possibility underneath the empty eloquence. But the audience can miss the balance and embrace only the joyful blarney of the stage Irishman; John P. Harrington outlines in his chapter "Brian Friel: Erin on Broadway" in his book *The Irish Play on the New York Stage, 1874-1966* that the producers, critics, and audiences in New York did exactly that. They revelled in the performativity of the Public/Private character, rather than realizing what that split represented. They chose the joy of enactment over the message of failure, and so chose the continuation of a successful Irish stereotype. McGrath dismisses the play as overrated for this reason: "For all its innovative stagecraft, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* remains within the milieu of [Friel's short] stories aimed at an American audience. The play deals with all the charming clichés of Irish life Friel thinks American audiences are interested in. He was right. *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* had the longest Broadway run of any Irish play up to that time (326 performances)" (*Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 70-71). Of course McGrath, like those audiences, misses Friel's undercutting of those clichés and the audience's interest in them. Richard Tillinghast also stresses the importance of the reception of Friel's plays:

---

[58] See Nicholas Grene, "Friel and Transparency" 140-42 for a comparison of the stage and film versions of the story.

> A play is not a tissue of ideas, however, or even of words, but rather a spectacle, an experience. Leaving a Brian Friel play, looking for a taxi or hurrying to the pub before closing time, one is less likely to feel depressed by the puritanical repressiveness of small-town Ireland than heartened by an impression of the human spirit asserting itself in the face of impediments: [for example] Gar's mordant asides....And remembering *Lughnasa*, one smiles, thinking of the play's most celebrated (and, significantly, almost wordless) scene, where the Mundy sisters, inspired by music from their "voodoo" radio, break into spontaneous dance, a pure expression of defiance and transcendence. (41)

Tillinghast notes the positive reaction to Gar's comic eloquence before moving to the simple joy inspired by the dance of the Mundy sisters. Such a reaction can be a positive one. It can leave the viewer with a sense of possibility despite all the obstacles; it can also lead the viewer to overlook the obstacles. Friel builds a deliberate sense of parody, of caricature into this "Irish" dance. At the end the dance exists only in a tenuous memory space. If you focus on the joy of the enacted dance to the exclusion of the bitterness of the narrative revelation, if you focus on nostalgia over reality, then you too could book a trip to "Friel Country." The1998 premiere of the film version of *Dancing at Lughnasa* allowed Minister of Tourism Dr. Jim McDaid to talk to reporters about turning Friel and his work into a nostalgic brand name to entice those who want a taste of auld Ireland: "'The Friel country' is going to be as big a tourism brand as Killarney if [I have] anything to do with it" (qtd. in Fagan, Nov. 11 n.pag.). McDaid even undermines Friel's success with using dance to supplement language as a way to move outside traditional stagnant dialogues. McDaid makes blarney of the dance as well by having a "spirited troupe" accompany his announcement: "A troupe of young musicians and dancers from Glenties, close to Brian Friel's fictional Ballybeg, silenced the chattering party throng with a spirited display which got a hugely enthusiastic response. And the dancers' mothers clustered at the side of the stage almost burst with pride" (Fagan, Nov. 11 n.pag.). McDaid promoted here the "Friel Country" brand to America, but he also had plans for across the border in Northern Ireland, and "he also cited the Canadian market as one where historic links with the unionist community could be useful in promoting Ireland as a tourist venue" (Fagan, Nov. 11 n.pag.). I'm waiting anxiously for my brochure, providing that is, of course, that I am not currently writing it myself.

McDaid's desire to transform Donegal into "Friel Country" follows the general trend for branding and synergy so favoured in advertising and, particularly, in film,[59] but it also follows the trend in this century–which reached its apotheosis in Brendan Behan–to make the Irish playwright assume the role of the Stage Irishman off stage. In this scenario, Friel must come from an idyllic rural landscape still basking in the reflected glory of the Celtic twilight. Harrington points out that, as early as 1966, American writers responding to the New York premiere of *Philadelphia* linked Friel to the eloquent tradition of Synge and O'Casey, before adding "humble and rural to the well-known prototypes" (154). More recently, in response to the opening of *Lughnasa* on Broadway in 1991, Julie Kavanagh described Friel as the perfect Irish guest for America's Katherine Hepburn: "Friel, the hard-drinking, brilliant Irishman, is exactly her type" (134). Perhaps such seemingly inevitable characterizations help explain Friel's extreme reluctance to give interviews. Perhaps he is trying not to assume the easy mantle of the public stage-Irish playwright which Behan has left. His preferring to speak in the private public voice of his plays allows for a removal of certainty concerning his public pronouncements and public identity. Any public pronouncement in them remains tangential and qualified. Any exploration of identity may suggest, as I would argue with *Lughnasa*, some potential for a more stable identity but never a complete and easily achievable sense of self. The very form he chooses to work in, drama, thrives on uncertainty. Pronouncements on identity, or place, or politics, will vary every night to some extent depending on performance, reception, and the interaction between the two. After all, despite Friel's oft-repeated assertion that his script should be looked on as an "orchestral score" which should not be amended or cut by the director and actors but only interpreted ("Self-Portrait" 21), this very desire for faithful interpretations of his work reveals the possible variety in production, and that even a faithful production must interpret as well. Friel chose to abandon the very Irish form of the short story, with its more inherent authorial control, for an arguably more open form. When pigeonholed as writing successful "Irish" plays, he altered course once more.

---

[59] In fact, under the direction of McDaid, "Bord Fáilte [the Irish Tourism Board] is using the release of *Dancing at Lughnasa* as a platform for a campaign to increase tourism from North America" (Fagan, Nov 10, n.pag.)

> Although *Philadelphia* was a remarkable play, prefiguring some of the later work in its preoccupations; it was a virtuoso performance of the kind of Irish eloquence which had come to be expected from Irish playwrights in particular. It was "fine writing"....Friel had the courage to deprive himself of that ready-made appeal, that fixed audience, that commercial success, and to set out to write all over again the stories and plays of his immediate past. (Deane, "Introduction" 16)

When he then moved back in *Lughnasa* to the same kind of fine Irish writing that brought him early success in *Philadelphia,* Friel added the element of dance to allow a form of slippage, one propelled by action as well as by eloquence. *Lughnasa* contains the expected traditional Irish eloquence, but Friel adds an unexpected traditionally non-Irish action which fosters slippage out of the certainty of an established stage-Irish stereotype of verbal blarney. As an added benefit, this slippage out of eloquence is also a slippage out of language itself, in particular English. From within the colonizer's language, Friel is able to slip beyond linguistic colonization, at least in a tenuous performative space.

Right Back Where I Started From?

> I don't know. I–I–I don't know.
>
> *Quick Curtain* (*Philadelphia* 99)

> When I remember it, I think of it as dancing. . . . Dancing as if words no longer existed because words were no longer necessary . . .
>
> (*Slowly bring up the music. Slowly bring down the lights.*) (*Lughnasa* 71)

Returning, like Friel, to my starting point, I find that the endings to these two plays have something to say about the final theatrical impact of these plays as well. The quick curtain in *Philadelphia* highlights the collapsing stage space of the play: the curtain cuts off the possibility of any movement beyond lack of knowledge. Gar eternally retreats back into his room, into the imprisoning naturalistic world. On the other hand, the slow build up of music and then slow fade of lights after the last lines of *Lughnasa* illustrate the nature of this theatrical universe, open to possibility, and to knowledge, beyond constricting "fact" and beyond constricting naturalism. *Philadelphia* collapses; *Lughnasa* expands. *Lughnasa* also expands to incorporate more concerns by including the pagan/Catholic divide as well as the industrial versus rural theme so common to debates of Irish identity and place. Friel incorporates within this private play the concerns of the intervening public plays about language, history, and ultimately the role of the writer in coming to terms with these notions. *Lughnasa* marks a return to *Philadelphia*, but far from a return "right back where he started from."

CHAPTER THREE: THE HEALER? AND THE HEALED?

FAITH HEALER AND *MOLLY SWEENEY*

> Then for the first time there was no atrophying terror; and the maddening questions were silent. At long last I was renouncing chance.
>
> (*Faith Healer* 376 – 1979)

> Real – imagined – fact – fiction – fantasy – reality – there it seems to be. And it seems to be alright. And why should I question any of it anymore?
>
> (*Molly Sweeney* 67 – 1994)

Friel returns with another recent play, *Molly Sweeney,* to the dramatic world of an earlier play – this time *Faith Healer*. In these two plays Friel underlines the role of the artist/healer and his effect on the creation/healed. In the closing lines quoted above Friel both asserts the position and experience of the two "I"'s (Frank Hardy's as artist/healer and Molly Sweeney's as creation/healed), and suggests the devastating effects of an ultimate end to questioning of those identities, those positions, those experiences. Both endings have a certain lyricism created by exceptional storytelling, but, despite the seemingly positive claims of the protagonists, both end in disaster: both Frank and Molly take comfort in the end of questioning, but this comfort comes at the cost of Frank's life in *Faith Healer* and Molly's sanity in *Molly Sweeney*, at the cost of their selves, their identities. Friel is hardly optimistic for either the healer or the healed, for either the writer or those written, though, paradoxically, he expresses his concerns about healing/writing through the effectiveness of these writings. In both plays, he emphasizes the creative and destructive potential of the playwright/healer and the effect of that potential on the audience/creation, but Friel shifts from an emphasis on the creator in *Faith Healer* to the effect on the created in *Molly Sweeney*. In doing so, he shifts from the male creator, to the effect of that male creating on the female creation.

Theatrically, with *Molly Sweeney* as with *Lughnasa,* Friel once again both returns to and departs from his earlier work. He reuses the three character monologue structure from *Faith Healer* in *Molly Sweeney*, but, by having all characters on stage and interspersing their speeches, he creates a kind of dia/monologue. In *Faith Healer*, Friel forces the audience to confront the differing versions of the same events respectively given by Frank, Grace, Teddy, and Frank again: versions which each believes is true, but the truth of each in certain significant details denies the truth of the others. On the other hand, in *Molly Sweeney*, though determining a single "truth" does become difficult at the end, the three characters, do not primarily give different versions of the same events. Instead, Molly, Frank, and Mr. Rice give their own versions of the world as they see, experience, and understand it; these versions then impose on, bounce off, and reflect on each other, giving a cumulative, multi-faceted view of the whole. Corresponding to the subtle switch in technique from *Faith Healer* to *Molly Sweeney* is a shift in emphasis: Friel moves from emphasizing the healer in *Faith Healer* to emphasizing the healed in *Molly Sweeney*, from the male to the female, from the teller to the told (both created and commanded). These plays also return to the concern with memory discussed in the previous chapter, but the emphasis shifts here too, from the remembered to the remembering and specifically to the rememberer or the forger (in both senses of the word) of memory. Friel shifts from an examination of factual and fictional memory in *Philadelphia* and *Lughnasa* to an examination of the one(s) manipulating factual and fictional memory in *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*–in short to an examination of his own role. In doing so, he also considers, as he does with memory itself, whether the one reconstructing the memories, the writer, ultimately enables or disables, heals or harms, the audience.

Friel returns also to his continuing insistence on uncertainty, which will recur throughout his body of work.[60] He has in fact, in several reluctant interviews and articles, expressed certainties and uncertainties about the importance of the writer's role–his role–and the potential effect on the audience–the Irish. In his early article, "The Theatre of Hope and Despair," (1968) he reviews the bleakness in contemporary European drama, and posits the need for a theatre of hope while understanding the responses of despair.[61] According to Friel, "[playwrights] have this function: they are vitally, persistently, and determinedly concerned with one man's insignificant place in the here-and-now world. They have the function to portray that one man's frustrations and hopes and anguishes and joys and miseries and pleasures with all the precision and accuracy and truth they know; and by doing so help to make a community of individuals" (17). While Friel seems to underline the power of despair by noticeably placing the bleak options before the hopeful ones in this passage, he does conclude by stressing the potential in such an honest portrayal to foster a renaissance in the community – "a community of individuals" (17). He later goes on to describe the playwright's role, presumably through honest portrayals, as being the voice of the people ("Two Playwrights with a Single Theme" 224). Still later, he adds (in the play *Translations* as well as in interviews) that, given the postcolonial dilemma of speaking and writing in the colonizer's tongue, the Irish writer has a particular responsibility and challenge to find a voice and a way of expressing it: the Irish must make the English language and the English theatre their own (qtd. in Agnew, "Talking to Ourselves 60"). More than merely finding and expressing that voice, Friel also had a wish to use it to affect and influence the audience. Part of forming Field Day was a desire to "talk to [the audience] in a different voice and...adjust them to our way of thinking" (qtd. in O'Toole, "The Man From God Knows Where" 23). Through such talking the Irish might achieve at least a cultural state with the possibility of a political one to follow (22-3). As Joan E. Robbins puts it, "he [Friel] penetrates the darkness of spiritual crisis, both individual and communal, offering his audience the possibility of self-recognition, and a way of initiating the process of healing" (75).

---

[60] See for example Jose Lanters, "Brian Friel's Uncertainty Principle."

Despite such hope for the potential of the role of the writer, Friel maintains a healthy distrust of his own role as prophet or healer as well. In a very early interview with Graham Morrison, Friel noted the difficulty of persuading people to act after the play is over. He also believes that if intellectual persuasion is the writer's goal then the play will certainly fail to move: "The end purpose is to move them, and you will move them, in a theatre anyhow, not through their head but through their heart" ("An Ulster Writer" 6). Friel even distrusts his own intellectual pronouncements, which he gives in interviews, about his plays. In the O'Toole interview he responds with "I don't know" five times. Indeed, he doesn't like interviews partly because "things seem so much more definite in the way [he's] quoted in interviews" (qtd, in Gillespie, "Saturday Interview: Brian Friel" 6). Friel recognizes that writing in a language and form derived from the colonizer, can tend to lead to a mere reification of the dominant institutions already in place. Uncertainty can be a way to avoid stereotypical definition.[62] Friel wants to maintain a position of liminality, of flux, of uncertainty for both himself and his works. For such flux may be, he believes, the only productive way to move uncertainly away from the given certainties.

---

[61] Later in "Two Playwrights with a Single Theme" (1972) Friel acknowledges some of the newer European playwrights whom he sees as interested in providing hope (223).

Healer?

Asked if *Faith Healer* was, and is, about the writer[63], Friel replied uncertainly:

> I suppose it has to be. It was some kind of metaphor for the art, the craft of writing, or whatever it is. And the great confusion we all have about it, those of us who are involved in it. How honourable and how dishonourable it can be. And it's also a pursuit that, of necessity, has to be very introspective, and as a consequence it leads to great selfishness. So that you're constantly, as I'm doing at this moment, saying something and listening to yourself saying it, and the third eye is constantly watching you.

---

[62] Friel is aware that he may be redeploying stereotypes even as he tries to escape them: particularly when the stereotype expands to invest the playwright himself. Friel is particularly wary of what he describes as the English tendency to consider Irish playwrights as "resident clowns" (qtd. in Radin 34).

[63] Paul N. Robinson notes that, from as early as an initial review by Richard Eder of the New York premiere, "critics have quite agreed on the metaphor of the artist and his art as an appropriate reading of the play" (224).

> And it's a very dangerous thing because in some way it perverts whatever natural freedom you might have, and that natural freedom must find its expression in the written word. So there's the exploration of that – I mean the element of the charlatan that there is in all creative work. (qtd. in O'Toole, "Man From God Knows Where" 22)

When Friel says that a playwright must "forge...300 imaginations into one perceiving entity" ("Extracts *Aristocrats*" 16 December 1977, 43), he is aware of both the potential to create and to con.[64] Explaining why he was attracted to writing for the theatre, Friel expressed his appreciation of the playwright as con man:

> I'm attracted to everything that's vulgar and cheap about theatre, and a lot of theatre is vulgar and cheap. It's very attractive....To force an audience into a single receiving and perceptive unit is a very easy thing to do. It's like if you are a conjuror you can do certain tricks....It's a very easy thing once you have forged those 500 disparate people into one receiving entity...to make them laugh,...to make them cry, and those are all very tempting tricks to play and they are cheap tricks and they are vulgar tricks. (qtd. in Finnegan 125-6)

Friel asks himself, as he does of Frank Hardy in this play, if a miracle is possible, or only a trick. Can he use these tricks to accomplish a more profound forging? Can the healer/writer work a miraculous healing both within the body of the play and a crippled body politic. As Seamus Deane suggests about *Faith Healer*, "Friel is intimating to his audience that there is an inescapable link between art and politics....The mediating agency is, as always, disappointment, but it is a disappointment all the more profound because it is haunted by the possibility of miracle and of Utopia" ("Introduction" 20).

Even in the title of the play Friel stresses the dual possibilities of profound miracle and confidence trick. By having the coincidence of initials between the title and the title character, *Faith Healer* and Frank Hardy, Friel suggests both miraculous convergence and cheap chicanery in his own art. Just in case we miss the point, Friel has the poster juxtaposing name and calling on the backdrop from the beginning of the play. Then, early in the play, he has Frank call attention to the poster when introducing himself: "I beg your pardon – *The Fantastic Francis Hardy, Faith Healer, One Night Only.* (*A slight bow.*) The man on the tatty banner" (332). By doing so, Friel introduces the possibility of the fantastic together with the usually sordid reality – the tatty banner. In addition, Frank's gesture of showmanship in the bow underlines the potential trick of performance and the potential promise, while showing an ironic self-awareness. Frank asks of himself shortly after, "*Am I endowed with a unique and awesome gift?...*[Or] *Am I a con man*" (333): both artist and con man take a bow. "His gesture establishes the self-conscious theatrical nature of the proceedings we are about to witness, particularly in relation to Frank Hardy's sense of his own identity" (Roche *Contemporary* 107). Friel also has Frank call deliberate attention to the initials themselves, to his trick, within the play: "The initials were convenient, weren't they? FH – Faith Healer" (333). In calling attention to himself, to his naming, Frank calls attention to Friel himself – the namer. Does Frank craft miracles or deceptions; will Friel craft a miracle or a trick? According to Frank, Friel's chances for a miracle are one in ten (334). While the happy convergence of initials looks like an overwritten trick calling attention to the construction of the play (as any actor will tell you, there's nothing worse than having to say the title of the play), many critics have noted the links between naming, power, and writing explored in this play and throughout Friel's work: "To name something is to exercise a power over it" (Kiberd, "Faith Healer" 115)[65] Colm Kelly suggests that "the effectivity, the certainty of the power of the proper name, the identity between proper name and person, is really a guarantee of being 'whole in myself'" (458). But Frank and Friel have no such certainty about the name and the self. Later in the play, Hardy brings out the newspaper article about the miraculous curing in

---

[64] As am I when I include this quotation in an effort to "forge" my academic credentials: moulding "300" sources into one text.

---

[65] See also, for example, Seamus Deane's "Brian Friel: The Name of the Game" for a discussion of the spectrum of naming between metaphysical and historical in Friel's work with *Faith Healer* standing for the metaphysical pole where naming inevitably alters the thing named "as in itself" and *Translations* standing for the historical pole in which naming involves "some violent longing for possession" (111).

Glamorgan, noting that "it identified [him]–even though it got [his] name wrong" (371). Naming is both necessary and necessarily misnaming.[66] The naming of the namer, Frank Hardy as Friel's storytelling surrogate, and then misnaming him as Frank Harding, reveals an uncertainty about the power of the artist to control his naming–to either write or heal. The trick with the initials, and the tone between disrespect and mocking (333), covers and uncovers a deeper unease about the simplicity of the convergence and the difficulty of real convergence in what Frank and Friel attempt to do. The trick sets up the condition of this play–and indeed any play, as this play relentlessly exposes. Performance is, like this convergence of initials, "balanced somewhere between the absurd and the momentous" (336), between the trick and the miracle, between the con man and the artist.

In his excellent article on the play, "Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*," Declan Kiberd credits Friel as raising the question of con man versus artist, "one of Friel's innermost themes" (108).[67] He goes on to note that at the end when

> Hardy renounced change...he degraded himself from the status of the artist to that of mere performer. The artist always keeps his eye remorselessly on his subject, whereas the performer is always watching his audience. The artist risks the displeasure of his audience as he maintains a congenial relationship with his subject, whereas the performer risks the betrayal of his subject as he seeks a congenial relationship with his audience. (113)

But Friel's chosen form, the theatre, demands just such an attention to the audience. The theatre demands performance. Friel must always attempt to balance performance and subject, and to degrade neither. In some sense, performance is his subject. Friel's constant concern with form suggests that again and again he seeks the right performance for the subject and vice-versa. Through a successful intermingling of performance and subject, Friel balances the performer and the artist, the con man and the artist, to such an extent that he presents the con man as artist in this play and the playwright as con man/artist in general. In the quotation taken from the O'Toole interview that began this section, Friel noted both the undermining questioning of self and the necessity for the charlatan in all creative work. As Kiberd notes earlier in his article, "the first audience the artist must con is himself" (109).

---

[66] In some sense then Friel must approve of D.E.S Maxwell's further misnaming in *Modern Irish Drama 1891-1980* in which Frank Hardy/Harding becomes Frank Harvey (203). Maxwell's misnaming both confers and removes authority from the original. A work such as Maxwell's places *Faith Healer* in the canon and subjects it to the inevitably different readings, understandings (and misunderstandings), and namings which a play in the canon will undergo at the hands of critics (as indeed the play is currently undergoing at my hands). Such slippage may undermine, or it may further, the playwright's goals, but at least it offers a chance for a productive uncertainty, a productive catachresis as well as the potential danger of a reductive reifying of hegemonic ideologies.

[67] See also Elmer Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel* 159, and Richard Kearney, "Language Play" 28-29.

Friel's great concern for performance is revealed in a trick or con he pulls, before the play even begins, in his opening note on stage directions:

> **Note*: Stage directions have been kept to a minimum. In all four parts the director will decide when and where the monologist sits, walks, stands, etc. (331)

Friel, a "notoriously" controlling writer who wants his plays performed with exactness, like an orchestral score, seems to cede control to the director and performer. Yet that same ceding of control asserts that all remaining stage directions are of crucial importance. They are the bare minimum that must be followed in performance. In a play that has seemed to many critics to be extremely literary, Friel insists on the importance of the performance moments both in production and in reading. In any interpretation of the play, you ignore the necessary "minimum" at your peril.

In fact, the debate over performance, or lack of it, has dogged this play since its initial run in New York. Critics have variously called it, along with *Molly Sweeney*, the most and the least theatrical of his plays. Declan Kiberd succinctly poses the question of dramatic form in the play: "how can a play consisting of four separate monologues by characters who never openly confront each other be a fully *dramatic* work, in any real sense of that word?" (106) Richard Pine suggests the difficulties the play might have before an audience (or critic): "Many of his plays, *Faith Healer* in particular, leave themselves open to criticism because they appear to lack dramatic impact" (*Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 127). Before experiencing the power of the piece in performance, Anthony Roche thought, "that in many ways the play seems undramatic since it never manages to bring any of its characters into direct dialogue, the setting is virtually non-existent, and the form is monologue, which might as well be read in private or on the radio" (*Contemporary* 107). In his review of the premiere, Richard Eder describes the play as "an intriguing and sometimes powerful piece of writing. But it doesn't seem well suited for the stage" (C3).[68] Friel himself seems to make fun of such a reception in the very short satirical sketch "American Welcome." Written for an American new play festival, the Humana Festival in Louisville, in 1980, a year after the rather cool reaction to the American premiere of *Faith Healer* in New York in 1979, this ironically named sketch is about the problems a playwright might encounter in having a play wholly consisting of monologues produced: "Second problem: the form of your play. We're uneasy with the form. I mean to say we're not uneasy with the form–it's just that you've written this wonderful naturalistic play but you've written it in monologue form! A naturalistic play in monologue form for God's sake!" (113). Friel playfully undermines the American by having this sketch itself, which is ostensibly a dialogue, be a "naturalistic play in monologue form."[69] The American's comments underline the traditional criticism made about *Faith Healer*, and indeed made of several other plays by Friel: they are too literary. The title of Thomas Kilroy's article "Theatrical Text and Literary Text" suggests the blurring of genres in Friel, and the potential problems and promise of that blurring. Kilroy says that, in *Faith Healer*, "Friel has consciously eschewed the usual notion of what dramatic action should be, the direct inter-play between characters" (100). Kilroy, in fact, locates the conflict in Friel's plays (and I would argue this play in particular) between literary and theatrical text. The dramatic agon, or contest, is between versions of literary storytelling: "Whole sections of dialogue in the plays appear to be composed of compacted story-telling, speaker vying with speaker, the dramatic conflict in the competitiveness between the different tellings" (98). Friel himself says of the structure of *Faith Healer* that "you do lose what are commonly accepted to be the normal dramatic tensions or the normal dramatic interest, but I think there's a possibility you can succeed on different levels...On the level of storytelling for example" (qtd. in Farren 125). Kilroy's separation of dramatic and literary echoes the separation between performer and artist in the production and reception of *Faith Healer*. Literature confers weight and authority, while performance suggests ephemerality and triviality: in Friel's sketch it is Americans, and in particular the American, who perform. Yet Friel moves from the short story to theatre, from literature to drama. He insists on performance. He insists on the stage directions.

---

[68] For some other critics on the unconventional nature of the form, a form which seems to attack conventional dramatic structure, see Hogan (131); Kilroy "Theatrical and Literary Text" (91); Hughes (177); and Tillinghast (37).

[69] Friel also satirically nods to the importance and power of naming, of controlling the story. He mocks the producer's misuse of power, while at the same time underlining that power: the American, the one who ultimately gets to control the story, to name and misname, bequeaths no less than ten (wrong) names on the European in less than three pages of text.

The stage directions, in particular the opening stage directions, set up the nature of the dramatic and literary conflict; they set up the importance of the performance and space, prior to the words and, with a typically Frielian paradox, of the words prior to the performance and space. The directions specify that *Faith Healer* begins in darkness:

> *The stage is in darkness. Brief pause.*
>
> *Then out of this darkness comes* FRANK'*s incantation, 'Aberarder, Aberayron...' At the end of the second line bring up lights very slowly, first around him and then gradually on the whole set.* (331)

From out of the darkness come the words of the incantation, and the words bring light. Friel puts a religious emphasis on creation and the creator by having Frank call this place into existence. By doing so he also places an emphasis on the ritual of theatre itself. Friel has said that "ritual is part of all drama. Drama without ritual is poetry without rhythm – hence not poetry, not drama. This is not to say that ritual is an 'attribute' of drama: it is the essence of drama. Drama is a RITE, and always religious in the purest sense" (qtd. in Dantanus, *Brian Friel: A Study* 87). Accordingly, Frank prays to begin this performance:

> *Throughout this opening incantation he is standing down stage left, feet together, his face tilted upwards, his eyes shut tight, his hands in his overcoat pockets, his shoulders hunched.* (331)

Having already emphasized the words themselves preexisting the physical self on stage, Friel's stage directions now emphasize the religious nature of these words through this very specific physical description, and by calling the words, for the second time, an incantation. Frank will then reinforce the intended significance of the words by describing his performance thus far as an incantation (one that will prepare the audience for the performance to come):

> FRANK: (*Eyes closed*)
>
> Aberarder, Aberayron,
> Llangranog, Llangurig,
> Abergorlech, Abergynolwyn,
> Llandefeilog, Llanerchymedd,
> Aberhosan, Aberporth . . .
>
> All those dying Welsh villages. (*Eyes open.*) I'd get so tense before a performance, d'you know what I used to do? As we drove along those narrow winding roads I'd recite the names to myself just for the mesmerism, the sedation of the incantation –
>
> Kinlochbervie, Inverbervie, . . . (331-2)

Frank's words and actions echo each other. He talks of what he used to do before performances, but at the same time he is doing it. "The mesmerism, the sedation, of the incantation" is for the audience in the theatre as well. Frank invokes his preparation for the ritual of faith healing, while Friel invokes the ritual magic of theatre, of performance; therefore, for the audience in the theatre there must also be the possibility of a faith healing, of redemption or transcendence. In "the earliest manifestations of theater...connections between ritual and sacrifice, exalted words, and the force of destiny are very much to the fore. The ritual of faith healing has several obvious theatrical features, including the role-playing confidence of the healer and the malleability and suggestibility of the audience" (O'Brien 100-101). Friel further includes the audience in this invocation of theatre through the contrast between the strange words of the incantation and the easy familiarity of the direct address to the audience. The strangeness evokes the ritual while the familiarity brings the audience into the ritual. He underlines this contrast with the stage directions about Frank's eyes opening and closing. Friel again emphasizes the importance of this point, as he did with the incantation, by repeating in the stage directions that Frank's eyes are closed or "*shut tight*" through the opening invocation. Only when Frank begins his familiar address to the audience do the eyes open. He opens his eyes and we appear. Friel thus invokes the performer, the performance, and the performed to.[70] We are all part of the ritual of theatre, a ritual enacted in words and space.

While the words begin the play and remain eminent, the lights (or lack thereof), physical stance, costume, and set described in the opening stage directions emphasize that those words must be enacted in space. The words need the darkness to come out of. The very slow raising of the lights, first on Frank and then on the whole space, will later be echoed by the opening lights on Michael in *Lughnasa*. Like in *Lughnasa* these lights, in contrast to the rest of the space/performance, emphasize the importance of the speaker/performer/storyteller. Neither Grace nor Teddy receive such a prolonged visual introduction: we simply "discover" them on stage (341, 353).

As our first, and most important, visual signifier, Frank's stance and costume come under more scrutiny. The aforementioned stance (331) evokes an image of prayer with Frank looking to the heavens, but at the same time the stance also evokes the earthly, or looking down: his shoulders are hunched and his hands remain in his pockets. Conspicuously, the eyes looking up are not open. Frank remains in between prayer and performance, in the liminal position between inspired faith healer, or artist, and grubby con man.

---

[70] The ritual of the eyes closed and then opening will be ritually repeated to begin each of the other monologues (341, 354, 370). Frank repeats the ritual almost exactly while more briefly, while Teddy and Grace do not have the same immediate connection to the performance ritual; they are each copying Frank in their own way. Grace does so more than once (343).

Frank's costume then reinforces this liminality.

> *The overcoat is unbuttoned, the collar up at the back; either navy or black, and of heavy-nap material; a good coat once but now shabby, stained, slept-in. Underneath he is wearing a dark suit that is polished with use; narrow across the shoulders; sleeves and legs too short. A soiled white shirt. A creased tie. Vivid green socks.* (331)[71]

His clothes are both of quality and shabby. Just about every item worn is soiled or ill-fitting, showing its wear. The wear and travel-stains suggest that he always wears these clothes, that they are his performance attire as well. With these clothes he cannot successfully project either the image of artist or show(con)man. He is too shabby for a successful artist and dressed with too much taste for a successful showman. Only one clothing item seems out of place: the vivid green socks. These socks show no wear, and neither do they show the attempted good taste of the rest of the outfit. While literally they may suggest, as Jack's clothes do in *Lughnasa*, that Frank is dressing in the borrowed clothes of poverty, these socks imply other ideas as well. They echo the ridiculousness of Teddy's dress later, suggesting the element of the huckster underneath the surface in the faith healing: though the too short pants make sure that this element is not much underneath the surface. Additionally, vivid green in an Irish play, especially one written by a man who has been an avowed nationalist, cannot help but, as Anthony Roche suggests (*Contemporary* 121), signify Ireland as well. However, at the same time as the colour evokes Irish nationalism it also undercuts that kind of national symbol. After all, the symbol is only a pair of socks, and an incongruous pair at that. The symbol is at best a poor con, insufficient to define Frank's identity, but able to distort that identity.

Finally, the lights expand to reveal the sparseness of the acting area, consisting only of bare space, three rows of chairs, and a large poster on the back drop:

> *Three rows of chairs – not more than fifteen seats in all – occupy one third*

---

[71] The soiled nature of the "tatty banner" or poster also suggests this division between the state of the banner and the promises upon it, between the tarnished and the miraculous.

> *of the acting area stage left. These seats are at right angles to the audience. On the backdrop is a large poster:*
>
> The Fantastic Francis Hardy
> Faith Healer
> One Night Only
>
> *This poster is made of some fabric, linen perhaps, and is soiled and abused.* (331)

In the tradition of Beckett, and Yeats before him, this near empty set places a greater burden on the few items that are there: "Those few signifiers he admits...are all the richer in possible signification" (Roche 107). Both chairs and poster serve as metatheatrical reminders of performance for the audience. They help to recreate the performance space of Frank's usual faith healings, and to create the space for the performance or faith healing about to be enacted for, on, and with the audience. Both Daniel Leary and Anthony Roche note the significance of the chairs as representative of the audience within the play:

> The play opens with Frank addressing three rows of on-stage chairs so placed that the actual audience is a continuation of that other audience. (Leary 139)

> And this is where the chairs come in. Taken together with the poster, they indicate the extent to which the faith-healing performance described by all three characters is being re-enacted before us. This in turn makes the audience itself a crucial participant in the faith healing, extending the drama from the confines of the stage across the footlights to embrace the entire auditorium. (Roche *Contemporary* 108)

Frank's position on stage and the resulting gradual revealing of the set through lighting helps to clarify the reach "across the footlights." Frank's down left position would put him directly down stage of the chairs; when the lights gradually spread to encompass the set, the first objects they reveal are the chairs. This order of lighting emphasizes the importance of the chairs as a reflection of the audience, of us. The lights continue to spread gradually revealing the only other object, the poster on the back wall, and the two-thirds-empty space. Across that space, the poster ties the performances together: there is one poster for both sets of chairs, on stage and off.

All three characters reinforce the importance of the poster as a metatheatrical linking device by making overt gestures which call attention to the poster, before the poster calls attention to itself, ironically by its absence, in Part Four. In the first three monologues Friel uses the crucial minimum stage directions to highlight the importance of these gestures. I noted earlier that Frank calls attention to the poster, himself, the play, and the playwright through his gesture at the "tatty banner" (332). Grace later directs her speech trying to understand Frank's ability at the banner: "(*At banner*) Faith healer–faith healing–I never understood it, never. I tried to....But I couldn't even begin to apprehend it–this gift, this craft, this talent, this art, this magic–whatever it was he possessed, that defined him, that was, I suppose, essentially him" (349). By doing so, she directs our attention to the difficulty defining this current theatrical experience, to the difficulty in defining theatre itself. She also draws attention, as the play ultimately does, to the (potentially productive) impossibility of defining a living essential self or experience; the definition of essence is possible only when all uncertainty is removed. Finally, Teddy twice calls attention to the poster in his monologue. Initially, he gestures at it, as Grace does, as a substitute for, or link to, Frank (357); for the audience and the characters, the poster calls up Frank's earlier presence, his gesture to the poster, and explanation of the slogan. Like Grace, Teddy also ponders Frank's status as artist in conjunction with the poster, while we also ponder Frank's status as an artist in conjunction with Teddy. Later, in a more emphatic calling attention to the poster, Teddy gets up, moves to it, reads it aloud, and tells us a chronology of how it came to be there (365-6). This chronology helps sort out some of the mysteries of when and where the characters speak (particularly Teddy and Grace). In doing so, it gives a practical explanation for what had seemed a theatrical symbol linking the performance spaces, a part of the "miracle of theatre." In turn that practical explanation makes the poster work symbolically on another level. Teddy's "memento" (365) becomes a memento mori for both Teddy and us, first of Frank and then of Grace: the poster, read back to the preceding scenes, now seems to foreshadow its eventual possession by Teddy, and the deaths that will precede that possession. The words, "One Night Only," now suggest a more permanent final show.

The poster's absence in Part Four, then, seems to confirm the final nature of the poster's announcement: "its [the poster's] disappearance at the start of Part Four is shocking, the clearest indication of the fate that Frank is about to undergo" (Roche, *Contemporary* 108), or perhaps has undergone. Frank exists now beyond death, and life, beyond the "One Night," at the same time as he repeats that final night. Like the poster, the chairs too have disappeared. The chairs of course weren't present in Parts Two and Three, but, as those scenes took place outside the performance hall, the chairs had no naturalistic place in them. In this scene, clearly tied to Frank's first scene through his repeated starting and ending position and the presence of his coat where he left it on the lone chair remaining, the other chairs are no longer there and no longer necessary. The play does not have to recall or recreate those other performances now; now the audience and Frank interact in a fully present faith healing performance for the audience in the theatre. The poster and chairs, like the rickety performance halls, are a part of the past, and not a part of this faith healing present. At the same time, the absence of the poster implies a renouncing of his miracles, a renouncing of chance, as Frank puts it, a renouncing of life. Indeed Frank will throw away his life and identity, discarded as the poster has been and the newspaper clipping will be shortly, in "the most dramatic and disturbing gesture [which] repeats the disappearance of the other written record of his identity, the poster" (Roche 113). As more and more of the physical trappings are cast away, the pressure on the audience to interact with what is left increases. The tension between audience and performer increases, as does the connection between them. "*Faith Healer* demands, to an unusual extent, the idea of a shared experience between stage and audience, of collaboration between the two" (Dantanus, *Brian Friel: A Study* 172). The retelling of Frank's death night becomes increasingly vivid; it increasingly forces the audience to share in what becomes a recreation in which they take part:

> At this crucial late stage in the play, past and present, narration and what it

> narrates, are simultaneously co-present; the textual word is made flesh; and the audience moved from the role of passive consumers to active translators, interpreters of the words they are about to receive. (Roche *Contemporary* 113)

Beyond Frank's fated death, beyond the trappings of the theatre which create a somewhat safe distance, the audience must decide what it is that happens and has happened, what is true, and indeed what is truth, and what is important. Friel recreates and amplifies the tension in the theatre on any "one night" between audience and performers: who is responsible for the enactment? Frank says earlier about his faith healing, "Did it reside in my ability to invest someone with faith in me or did I evoke from him a healing faith in himself?" (333-4). Or, to rework Kiberd's suggestion, are the first people the audience have to con themselves?

From the beginning, Friel has placed an emphasis on the larger question of performance, of enactment, within this performance, preparing for this questioning culmination at the end. By doing so, Friel foregrounds the debate between performance and art in the theatre; an art which cannot exist without a performance, without an audience; an art over which the artist must immediately relinquish control; and an art which, because it includes performance, is always somehow suspect. In Part One, Frank describes his preparation for his art as a "performance" at the same time that he enacts it (332). In Part Two, Grace quotes Frank describing and mocking his ability by calling it performance. He repeats variations of the word six times in two pages of text (343-4). Later she quotes his healing of the finger in the final story as the "curtain-raiser" (352) for the big, final show to come. Teddy's very presence in Part Three seals the importance of performance in this art. Teddy's function as a purveyor of show business acts, especially of low end animal acts, underlines the tawdry show business side of the "art." At the same time, Teddy himself is a performance, one which Frank has enacted before Teddy ever comes on stage (334, 340). Friel, through Frank, ponders why the audience comes to these shows, and, indirectly, this show, this art. Frank "*[moves] through seats*" (336-7), recreating visibly one of his performances. Since the seats have a connection with the seats in the audience, Frank moves among us as well. During this action, Frank speculates about the motives of those coming to be healed, speculations which then apply to those in the theatre as well: "they knew in their hearts they had come not to be cured but for confirmation that they were incurable; not in hope but for the elimination of hope; for the removal of that final, impossible chance–that's why they came–to seal their anguish, for the content of a finality....But I couldn't do even that for them. And they knew I couldn't" (336-7). In doing so, Friel suggests some disquieting motives for his Irish audience and some disquieting probabilities about the effectiveness of art in the Irish situation. Like the seduction of Frank into certainty and into death at the end of the play, the seduction of certain ideological stances and inevitable violence is too great to be resisted. Irish audiences look to art then not for inspiration but for confirmation of despair, not for healing but for continued illness, not for healers but for martyrs.

However, this emphasis on performance occurs in a play in which, many would argue, little performance, little action, takes place. The characters for the most part, simply talk. The faith healing is referred to, not enacted. Robert Welch suggests that we never see any faith healing on stage because it would be too difficult to enact and to accept: "the audience in the theatre never *see* Hardy performing; thereby avoiding scenes which would be unworkable theatrically" (143). Or do we? Friel deliberately melds the faith healing and acting in this play. He, as Richard Eder suggests, challenges the actors to "transcend their [character's] attributes" (C3). He might have added that Friel also challenges his actors to transcend the deliberate limitations of minimal space, setting, and movement, and of almost no action. Done as it should be, the performance can indeed transcend:

> What one could never forget about his [Donal McCann as Frank Hardy] performance was the stillness, the sense of nothingness almost, from which his rendering of the character sprang. As he stood motionless on the bare stage, risking the longest pauses I have ever heard and getting away with them, one glimpsed the abyss from which the human enterprise proceeds. (Tillinghast 37)

Ironically, all of McCann's performance triumphs described by Tillinghast come from what would seem to be limitations of his performance: from a lack of action, from stillness, from nothingness, from bare space, and from silence.

With this contrasting style, Friel highlights the dual tendencies, identified by Kilroy, to both literature and drama in the play. Friel seems to create a contradiction between storytelling and dramatic performance, but through these very contradictions establishes storytelling as performance. The performer seeming not to perform, performs most effectively. From the beginning, Frank the storyteller controls the enaction. He includes and excludes the stories and characters of the play.[72] For example, early on he begins to give an account of his origins, of his father, but quickly rejects that as "another story"(333) – one which he does not want us to hear. Later, at the end of the first part, Frank uses his power over the tale to delay the ending of his story:

> But we'll come to that presently. Or as Teddy would have put it: Why don't we leave that until later, dear 'eart? Why don't we do that? Why not?
>
> Indeed.
>
> *(He looks at the audience for about three seconds. Then quick black.)*
>
> (341)

By exercising his power over the tale so openly while mimicking the "stagey" Teddy, Friel, through Frank, exposes the "performance" of the confidence man inherent in the storyteller. The storyteller too depends on tricks, on sleight of hand or mind or tongue. Frank further exhibits one of the major powers/tricks of the storyteller by creating the other characters for the audience through description and even performance before his "waiting till later" allows the others to enact themselves. Frank conjures Teddy and Grace in descriptions (334-5) which create the first mental picture of these characters for the audience. He further mimics Teddy repeatedly (334-5, 339, 341) as well as briefly portraying other characters from his stories: his father (338) and Donal, the man with the bent finger (339). Such portrayals underline the existence of performance within the storytelling. Later, in Part Two, Grace mimics or repeats repeatedly Frank's invocations. By doing so she emphasizes Frank's performative nature. On the one hand she seems doomed to repeat him, to fulfill her existence as his creation, but on the other she reenacts him, she takes upon herself some of his storytelling, his performative power. Grace, in this second part, challenges the facts of the storyteller and also the role of the storyteller. While Frank asserts control at the end of Part One by both delaying his story and exhibiting his mastery of Teddy through mimicry, his very invocation of this power leaves the field open for it to be taken from him. The stage direction at the end of Part One with Frank staring at the audience before a quick blackout indicates that the power of the tale lies in the listening, or at the very least in the connection between teller and audience – in the performance.

---

[72] Many critics have noted the connections between Frank Hardy/Friel and both shaman and *seanchai* through his storytelling. Friel himself notes, "The four monologues in *Faith Healer*, for example, have to be seen as stories because the Irish consciousness is more receptive to this; it is a tradition that goes back to the *seanchai*–the travelling storyteller" (qtd. in Dixon 11 (1980)). For a discussion of Frank Hardy as the traditional Irish bard or *seanchai*, see Ulf Dantanus, *Brian Friel: A Study*, 172-8; Kilroy, "Theatrical Text and Literary Text," 98; Roche, *Contemporary*, 115-16. For a discussion of Frank/Friel as shaman see Joan E. Robbins "Conjuring the Life of the Spirit in the plays of Brian Friel, 76; Ginette Verstraete, Brian Friel's Drama and the Limits of Language, 90; Marilyn Throne, "Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*: Portrait of a Shaman." For a discussion of Michael as narrator assuming the role of the *seanchai* in *Lughnasa* see Fusco 110-11, 119, 123 n.19.

This challenge at the end of Part One exemplifies how Friel constructs the structure and the style of the play in order to challenge the audience. Friel lampooned the Americans in "American Welcome" for not accepting a "naturalistic play in monologue form" or, as I have suggested about all of Friel's plays, the combination of natural or Stanislavskian performances with more Brechtian devices. On one level, Friel creates in *Faith Healer* precisely the play he mentions in "American Welcome" – a naturalistic play in monologue form. The monologues, in their very form, tend to break the naturalistic fourth wall -- though some do so more than others. Yet within each monologue, the characters themselves possess clear, distinct naturalistic identities and motivations, or at least seem to. Joe Dowling notes the difficulty for actors in the play who "must believe diametrically opposed accounts of the same events" ("Staging Friel" 182). They must enact Stanislavskian characters despite the difficulties of doing so. This contrasting second level pits the versions of reality (especially concerning Grace's dead baby and Frank's death at the end) against one another. This level provides a distancing or alienation which calls into question the seemingly whole identities of the characters and their tales. F.C. McGrath devotes an entire chapter on the play to a detailed comparison of the variations and reasons for them (*Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 158-76).[73] McGrath (and Kearney to a lesser extent ("Language Play" 29-31)) explores and details at length the truth of the events and the psychological motivations for the individual versions of those events, the individual truths. But the "truth of the events" and even "the individual truths" may be beside the point. Friel had to create believable Stanislavskian characters in order to create the disruption of their juxtaposed variations. The point of the play, of the performance, lies in their disjunctions, not their ultimate status as truth. "When Grace first says, 'Kinlochbervie's where the baby's buried' (344), any audience I've been a part of responds with a palpable gasp" (Roche, *Contemporary* 111). First the naturalistic identities and stories in the individual monologues appeal emotionally to the audience before the contrasts in their stories force a distancing as well: "The variations are important. They keep the audience at a kind of judgmental distance even while the bleak tangled story invites a degree of sentimental identification" (Fitzgibbon 57). In short, we believe all the characters and then find it impossible to do so.

The tension between distance and closeness plays with the inevitability of the stories, with the inevitablity of theatrical fate in general. From Frank's perspective the story must end his way, but the two other perspectives given suggest other possibilities of what did happen and what had to happen for the audience to consider. Like Ancient Greek theatre, the versions become more important than the story, the way there more important than the end, the how more important than the what. Friel has of course used a similar technique elsewhere. In *Freedom of the City*, *Living Quarters*, and *Lughnasa*, to an extent, the audience knows the ending from the beginning. But in *Faith Healer* he pushes farther. Indeed this play is like three versions of the Electra/Orestes myth in one play with each version casting doubt on the certainty and authenticity of the others. In his article "Theatrical Text and Literary Text," Kilroy notes that in an early version *Faith Healer* consisted of only one monologue and one character: Frank speaking "more or less" the first monologue including "a shortened version of the end of the present play" (100). Friel's initial creation of the single monologue and then decision to insert the other two underlines the extent to which he insists on their contrasting yet productive differences. Further, Friel's bringing in Frank like a *deus ex machina* at the end highlights both the closure and false closure of this moment. Friel is probably closest to Euripides here, formally closing the play, but raising as many questions with the closure as answering others.

---

[73] Almost every article on the play focuses, at least briefly, on the variations in the versions of events. Other critics who give a detailed discussion of the variations within the stories include Throne, "Portrait of a Shaman," 20-21; Fitzgibbon 57; Devinney 113-14; and, particularly, Dantanus, *Brian Friel: A Study* 173-5, 178-80. See also Worth 83 on the audience as "detectives" comparing these versions.

In helping to form Field Day Friel, like Yeats before him with the Abbey, wanted to create a theatre of the *polis* in the Ancient Greek tradition, a theatre where identity of self and community could be explored and engaged. But, whereas the Abbey was a conscious attempt, especially by Yeats, to copy the Greeks in using theatre to forge a national identity, Field Day was a conscious attempt to both find and fracture that identity in a search for a workable identity and a usable myth. Anthony Roche suggests about this play (*Contemporary* 117- 28) that Friel establishes identity not as originary but as differentiated.[74] Accordingly, Friel provides an ending that is both certain and not, final and not, working among the differences between the stories as much as within the stories themselves.

But if Field Day sets out to create an image for Ireland, and assuming Friel is engaging in a similar enterprise here, what image does he offer? From early in the play, Friel has raised the possibility of ritualistic theatrical sacrifice in the tradition of Ancient Greek theatre but with an Irish twist. Near the end of the first monologue, Frank describes the coming final night as "a Dionysian night. A Bacchanalian night. A frenzied, excessive Irish night when ritual was consciously and relentlessly debauched" (340). Friel's references deliberately invoke the Greek origins of Western drama in the Dionysian ritual, a ritual with potentially fatal implications. Many critics have noted the importance of fat(e)al ritual in *Faith Healer*. Hughes says that Friel, following his "mentor" Tyrone Guthrie, brings together all rituals, beginning with the Dionysian, in this ritual drama (180-81). Seamus Heaney suggests that this "conclusion...carries the drama back to that original point where it once participated in the sacred, where sacrifice was witnessed and the world renewed by that sacrifice" (237). Finally, Declan Kiberd adds that "the community assaults and finally slays the artist, whose ministry it nevertheless finds essential to its well-being" ("Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*" 112).

---

[74] As many others do about the question of Irish identity more generally. See especially Kiberd's Inventing Ireland.

At the same time, the use of the word debauched implies both a fulfilment and corruption of that ritual. Frank McGuiness notes that "Frank returns to the stage to die his death. As in Greek tragedy the violent action occurs off stage, reported by a messenger. But here the messenger is the man of action, the man of suffering himself, speaking from the grave" ("All the Dead Voices" 63). Rather than being an off stage object of the audience's pity, a repository for the audience's projections of empathy, the return of Frank as his own messenger disrupts the closure of this moment. Frank's message is denied by his presence delivering the message. Frank comes back to Ireland for violence, for sacrifice, but his "life after death" exposes both the propensity of the Irish desire for violence, for martyrdom in their myths and images, and the seductive power of that propensity. The final moment of the play seemingly signals an end to all disturbing questions of chance and choice, a moment that the martyr Frank shares with the audience. He moves towards both his reported and real audience, offering himself up as an answer to the "maddening questions" (376), but his continued presence belies the truth of that answer. Even after death, he is not silent. As well, Friel's creation of alternate versions of events ensures that the audience must still deal with "maddening questions." Friel fulfills and exposes the ritual with an appropriately debauched frenzy in the Bacchanalian tradition and with a debauching of that same frenzy.

The tension between distance and closeness in *Faith Healer* also evokes once again the placing of the burden of remembering upon the audience: an investigation begun in

Philadelphia, continued here, and, perhaps, fulfilled in *Lughnasa*. First, the form of the memory play, provides for both a distance from the memory and a closeness to the rememberer at the same time.[75] As we have seen in *Lughnasa*, differing versions of memories can be accepted as diverging yet complementary and enabling facts provided the fiction is both acknowledged as formatively true *and* fictional. Declan Kiberd claims that "*Faith Healer* is an eloquent apology for the distortions of memory, for it argues that every man must be an artist and illusionist, that every man must recast his memories into a pattern that is gratifying enough to allow him to live with himself" ("Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*" 118). While Frank seems to have the desired power of controlling and reconstructing memories in this play, he does not acknowledge them as fictional; the story takes over the storyteller as well. Instead, the burden of remembering, and then comparing those memories to search for a "truth," is laid on the audience. As Kiberd points out earlier (106) the play, unlike a novel, cannot be reread or rerun. The audience must remember and judge. Heinz Kosok goes so far as to claim that the radical contradictions in the memories prevent the audience from shaping a coherent story from the divergent threads: "*Faith Healer* is a play without a plot" (168). However, more radically still, I think, *Faith Healer* is not a play without a plot, but a play without an authoritative plot. Friel instead places the audience in the authorial position, constantly constructing and reconstructing the plot depending on the latest information, the latest memory. "We, the audience become the producers of the play's meaning. For this is, in Roland Barthes' terms, a "writerly" as opposed to a "readerly" text, one which forces the audience into an active, productive role rather than that of a mere passive consumer" (Elmer Andrews, "Fifth Province" 47).

Theatrically, Friel underlines the pressure he places on the audience through the tension between the breaking of the fourth wall and the remnants of fourth wall naturalism in both the setting and the characters. Kilroy suggests that Friel includes just enough naturalism to help the play rise above conventional naturalism: "In the end one has to concede that all the scenes simply happen upon a stage, that the naturalistic props are like remnants from another life beyond, deposited upon a stage to facilitate an enactment before an audience. In this way Friel elevates *Faith Healer* above conventional naturalism" ("Theatrical Text and Literary Text"). Kosok goes even further, describing the setting as "Beckettian non-scenery" (167). However, if Friel's intent were entirely to dispense with naturalism then why does he include the remnants? Such remnants hold even more strongly in the characters of the play who, despite their perhaps desperate attempts to articulate themselves, retain at least enough natural motive to want Kiberd's illusion of a gratifying pattern of themselves.

---

[75] For a more detailed discussion of memory in the play see F.C. McGrath's chapter "Postmodern Memory" in his *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* where he argues that the competing fictions of constructed personal memories in the play reflects on the competing constructed fictions at the political level as well: "*Faith Healer's* most profound postcolonial insight...is...that all notions of identity, personal or national, are the result of complex historical negotiations with others and that these hybrid identities are made manifest, at both the conscious and the unconscious level, in the narrative fictions we construct about ourselves in relation to others" (176).

Teddy in particular exemplifies the contradictions between natural and artificial on Friel's stage. On the one hand he is the most artificial of the characters, the one most linked to stage(y) traditions. If he weren't English, he would most clearly personify the stage Irishman. Indeed, in the original New York production Donal Donnelly, who played Private Gar--the most Stage Irish and most artificial character in *Philadelphia*, performed a similar function here as Teddy. Roche suggests that Teddy is so ostentatiously theatrical that "he constitutes Friel's revenge on centuries of stage misrepresentation of the Irish by concocting this stage Englishman, the loquacious, lovable, cockney comedian"(*Contemporary* 119). On the other hand, at the same time that Teddy banters with audience like a "cockney comedian," Friel gives him the most natural setting and the most natural actions. Compared with the other monologues, Teddy's monologue contains more than double the number of stage directions. "Teddy's is the longest single monologue, largely because of its profuse detail" (O'Brien 102). The stage directions describe him whistling, singing, pausing, getting beer, drinking, becoming enraged, in short behaving naturally. In Teddy's final stage direction, Friel has Teddy confronting the audience before lapsing back behind the fourth wall: "*He stands for some seconds just looking at the audience. Then he does not see them anymore. He sits on his chair and puts* *on the record. After the first few lines fade rapidly to black*" (369). In the end, the only one left alive retreats into his memories and into the naturalistic remembrances. Friel leaves the audience to wonder why Teddy does so. Roche suggests that Teddy, like Frank and Grace, is ultimately dead as well because he has no life beyond that of a theatrical creation (*Contemporary* 114). But Teddy is the one character left alive according to the information we are given: no one contradicts this fact at least. This final stage direction suggests that Teddy, as the one left alive, retreats into the natural behind the fourth wall to dwell on his memories. This action which sunders him from direct contact with the audience also, ultimately, reconnects him to the audience who alike must construct and reconstruct memory without the aid of the certain perspective beyond death which Frank has access to. George O'Brien says of Teddy that "his survival is notably undramatic" (101). For Teddy there is no final curtain. He, like the audience, continues.

By including both remnants of the fourth wall and the rupturing of the fourth wall, Friel gains the closeness of sentimental identification through naturalism and the intellectual distance provided by alienation. With the rupturing, Friel also gains the closeness of direct interconnection between audience and performers which pressures the audience to not merely identify with the plot and characters but to overcome the distance of complacency and passivity instilled by naturalism and to actively construct the plot and characters by constructing their own memories from the memories of the characters given to them.

In particular, the few, and therefore more important, physical moves in the play underline the pressures on, the challenge to the audience. Frank's first move in the play through the seats on stage (336) begins the pressure by tying the implied audience on stage to the one off stage. Next Frank "*comes right down, walking very slowly, until he is as close as he can be to the audience. Pause*" (340). He closes the distance between on stage and off, each slow step increasing the focus on the connection between himself, his words, and the audience. He seems to be leading up to the most challenging "final story" before he postpones that story and, using Teddy's voice, he closes Part One with a final challenging stare at the audience: "But we'll come to that presently. Or as Teddy would have put it:

Why don't we leave that until later, dear 'eart? Why don't we do that? Why not? Indeed" (341). The pressure seems relaxed as Frank puts off the big revelation or confrontation, but his "leaving that until later" actually prepares for an intensification of pressure that arrives when Grace first contradicts his words. Later in the play, before Teddy begins his version of the final story, Teddy reenacts, or rather enacts, the movement and words that Frank foreshadowed at the end of Part One: "(*He* [Teddy] *stops suddenly and stares for a long time at the audience. Then*:–) Tell you what – why don't I go back twelve months and tell you about that first night in Ballybeg? Why don't I do that? Why not?" (366) Unspoken, but echoing is Frank's final mocking word "indeed." Throughout Part Three Teddy connects directly with the audience,[76] but at this moment his connection deliberately echoes Frank's earlier connection: the challenge is still being made. Before he makes his final retreat, Teddy confronts the audience with yet another staring challenge (369). This challenge and retreat suggest one final confrontation with the audience before the play is over, before life is over fading "*rapidly to black*" (369), but Friel's *deus ex machina*, Frank, returns. As Roche notes, "It is a physical shock when Frank returns after Teddy's monologue" (*Contemporary* 125). Friel manipulates the rhythm's of the piece to confront, relax, and confront more strongly in contrast with the seeming fading.

From this moment on the challenges accelerate, as do Frank's actions:

> *In this final section* FRANK *is slightly less aloof, not quite as detached as in Part One. To describe him now as agitated would be a gross*

---

[76] Grace, it could be argued, does not make the direct public connection with and therefore challenge to the audience. Antony Roche suggests that her monologue "is by far the most private of the three....The interaction is that between psychiatrist and patient, with Grace doing the talking while we the audience are the silent, judging witness to her entreaties" (*Contemporary* 110). Grace's contradictions of Frank provide the audience with a factual challenge, while her echoes of Frank chanting and opening and closing his eyes suggest that she has some of the same stage power that he possesses. When later we discover that she too is dead then the patient/psychiatrist interaction becomes in retrospect, like Frank, another spirit talking. The freedom of the death space seems to give them both the freedom to break the fourth wall, and the relationship becomes a more direct audience/performer one that no longer needs a mitigating naturalistic reason for communication.

> *exaggeration. But there should be tenuous evidence of a slightly heightened pulse-rate, of something approximating to excitement in him, perhaps in the way his mind leaps without apparent connection from thought to thought; and his physical movements are just a shade sharper.* (370)

Frank shifts between three thoughts and moves twice in the half-page following this stage direction as the pacing literally increases. Soon after, his crumpling of the newspaper clipping provides an emphatic and dramatic dismissal of the past in favour of this current moment (371). Next his speech accelerates "*suddenly, rapidly*" (372) as he, and the play, build to the final telling/enactment. During this final speech, Frank moves upstage and, eventually, puts on his hat and overcoat, buttoning it slowly, deliberately suspending the moment with the speech and increasing suspense (374). Finishing with the ritual of the coat prepares Frank for the final ritualistic performance moment. At the end he "*takes off his hat as if he were entering a church and holds it on his chest. He is both awed and elated. As he speaks the remaining lines he moves very slowly down stage*" (376). Friel has Frank reenact the walking in to self-sacrifice by having Frank walk towards the audience. With this walk he recalls and intensifies the earlier step-by-step pressure of Part One's slow move to confront the audience. Joe Dowling describes the intensification created by Donal McCann in the role: "As [McCann as] Frank Hardy made his way downstage for the final moment of epiphany, delicately removing an imaginary piece of fluff from his coat, certain that he was going to his death, the focus of the entire audience was on his every tiny gesture" ("Great Thespians" n.pag.). At the end of the move, with his last words, Frank renounces chance by embracing death, but in the final four seconds of silence before a quick black he passes on the challenge of chance and fate to the audience (376). It will be up to us to decide whether to kill him or not, to accept healing or not.

Friel prepares the audience for this final passing on of the challenge with a deliberately underlined tension between set and description, between the theatrical and the literary. In doing so he (re)creates the vivid physical setting of the death scene out of the void of the actual setting while, of course, maintaining the tension between the actual bare theatre space and the detailed space embodied in the words. Friel begins to create this tension early in Part Four by having Frank refer to the bleakness of this space and all his performance spaces: "(*Looking Around*) It was always like this -- shabby, shabby, bleak, derelict" (372). Nearer to the end of this fourth part (375), Friel has Frank transcend this set with his vivid description of the death scene, a description whose nature as description Friel underlines through Frank's initial words, "I would like to describe that yard to you" (375). Finally, Frank even transcends this description with a further description, one which prepares for Frank's subsequent movement towards the audience that interweaves action and words:

> And though I knew that nothing was going to happen, nothing at all, I walked across the yard towards them. And as I walked I became possessed of a strange and trembling intimation: that the whole corporeal world--the cobbles, the trees, the sky, those four malign implements--somehow they had shed their physical reality and had become mere imaginings, and that in existence there was only myself and the wedding guests. And that intimation in turn gave way to a stronger sense: that even we had ceased to be physical and existed only in spirit, only in the need we had for each other. (375-6)

Friel toys with the "theatrical" solely with words. He first recreates the setting of the death scene for us only to move beyond that setting, creating a moment of transcendence in a setting and relationship which are, at the same time, very close to the actual, physical one in the theatre. At this moment, and particularly in the next and final moment, in a sort of theatrical no-space, the performer and the audience have "shed physical reality" and exist "only in the need they have for each other." In the end, we the audience, in our need for the performer and the performance, become McGarvey and the wedding guests, balanced in our waiting for healing and propensity to destroy.

The responses of audiences and critics since its first reception clearly indicate that Friel has, especially in this Fourth Part, created an attractive and powerful theatre magic. Still, the question remains: does Friel craft a miracle or a confidence trick? Friel makes death and sacrifice sweetly attractive with Frank's ability to speak in a "death-space," to define his own passing. "He is submitting to his gift in a mortal test which becomes a kind of sacrificial victory" (Maxwell, "'Figures in a Peepshow'" 58). Seamus Heaney suggests,

> The tragic emotion subsumes all kinds of loss and disappointment into itself, and there is a sense in which *Faith Healer* is a play of triumph and affirmation. The performer in Frank Hardy comes to his rescue at the very end so that he takes over his destiny into his own hands even as he hands himself over to the deadly custody of the dangermen at first light. There is a shine off the writing in this finale, a cathartic brilliance. (237)

But, in order to achieve such brilliance, Frank Hardy must embrace certain failure. "It is by actively choosing the certainty of failure instead of fighting it or attempting to escape from it that Frank achieves a form of wholeness; and although Frank had earlier wanted 'confirmation that...despair...wasn't its own healing' (p. 372), it is through despair – the absence of hope and the certainty of failure – that failure becomes a cure" (Lanters, "Gender and Identity" 287). Ironically, Friel's "cathartic brilliance" comes at the cost of embracing death as a cure. At the same time, Frank is still present after death. At the very moment of his embracing of failure, he "rises" above it. Part of the appeal of the play is the special theatre magic of this final part where Frank in a theatrical tour de force (and sleight of body) returns to perform again after his own death. Of course, unfortunately, in order to be able to speak upon his position, Frank must relinquish that position. The only possible place for speech, for understanding is a theatrical death-space, a space beyond naturalistic convention, but still a death-space. "Frank Hardy, alive and dead simultaneously, present before us after he has embraced his own death, is the ultimate anti-historical figure, existing in a ghostly but continual present tense" (O'Toole, "Marking Time" 204). This ghostly present tense, this death-space, while it signifies the ultimate loss of control, of self, also paradoxically allows for control of self, for articulation of self. Thus, this death-space becomes, in Field Day's terms, a kind of artistic fifth province, a space beyond the existing borders of representation. Anthony Roche goes so far as to claim that "the play's closing act, which is both an act of destruction (annihilation) and re-creation from nothing, is one rife with possibilities for a new postcolonial identity and drama" (*Contemporary*

121).

Yet is this moment and space real or illusory? Is it merely a seductive trick, a clever crafting of a spatial no-space. Ultimately, the certainty, the transcendence of the moment and the space ends in death, in a non-transcendence, in an embracing of failure as the cure. Deane claims a particular power for this space. Here, finally, "healing is not displaced to someone else; it is an action performed by the healer on the healer; just before he [Frank] dies he articulates himself. He authors himself in a final act of authority" ("Name of the Game" 111). But this articulation costs him both his life and his gift; this authority robs him of all other authority. In any case, the form of the play, the experience of the contrasting and mutually contradictory monologues, the experience of the full performance, as I have noted earlier, belies this authority. By contrasting Frank's embracing of certainty with the play's embracing of chance or uncertainty, Friel moves from trick to potential miracle, from one voice to many voices (first in the play and then to the audience), from healer to healing, from performer to audience. In doing so, Friel creates a potentially more productive fifth province in the interaction, in the space between audience and performer by an undercutting of certainty which leaves the final authorial decision up to the audience collectively and each audience member individually. According to Elmer Andrews, "Friel's form enforces the denial of the satisfactions of completion, closure and full knowledge. The play proclaims its own impotence by continually contradicting itself and countering any notion of finality and fixity" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 161). More than proclaiming its own impotence, the play, or more particularly the performance, transfers its potency to the audience. Andrews later adds:

> While constantly pursuing its own sense the play disrupts the forms of conventional drama–illusionism, narrative leading to closure, and a hierarchical arrangement of discourses–so that Friel can demonstrate his own freedom from control. The theatre space he creates is one where he can explore ambiguity and uncertainty, where he can refuse authoritarianism and demonstrate simultaneously his scepticism *and* his creativity, the limits of his art *and* its possibilities. (162-63)

Friel creates a multi-sided place of contestation and discourse rather than a place for the hollow triumph of a single authority. Frank embraces a self-sacrifice that leaves him in control of the ritual, while Friel ultimately truly sacrifices his own authority, his own control, in order to give the ritual of healing a chance to work in and with the audience. The theatre space he creates is, ultimately, one where *we* can explore, and experience, ambiguity and uncertainty, where *we* can both accept and refuse the burden of authoring, where *we* alternate between skepticism and belief, limits and possibilities.

By combining the theatrical and the literary so insistently, Friel captures both the impulse to authority and a relinquishing of that authority. In this way, Friel is able to access the kind of productive uncertainty, of lack of authorial control that Joyce wanted in *Ulysses* but couldn't quite achieve.[77] In the novel, the text, the author, naturally retain more authority while the playwright of necessity embraces uncertainty rather than certainty, embraces multiple interpretations, and embraces textuality through the nature of the process. Even Friel's attempt to insist on the "minimum necessary" stage directions, also allows and acknowledges the interpretations of others: "In all four parts the director will decide when and where the monologist sits, walks, stands, etc." (331). Many interpreters (designers, directors, actors) craft an interpretation of the text which is then interpreted by the audience both as a whole and individually. Theatre offers (and indeed insists on) the death of the author from the beginning and thus an always present potential play in performance and reception. Friel takes an arguably crippled, too literary, form and lays life on it with his hands: he makes the "non-theatrical" profoundly theatrical through insistent uncertain play.

Thus Friel offers not wholeness but partiality as a potential cure. While Joan E. Robbins claims that "in the end, we too have been the subjects of Frank's faith healing, healed by having the story made whole" (80), more productively, I think, we are healed by being able to construct our own whole out of the parts while knowing that our construction is not and cannot be completely, or the only, whole. Indeed, as Deane suggests about Frank's faith healing, "Friel asserts the lethal quality of the gift, the urge to create wholeness out of distortions" ("The Double Stage" 173). When Frank attempts to fix a whole body, he dies, but when he attempts to fix a single bent finger he succeeds. Friel, I think, recognizes the limitations and dangers of his particular gift. His success as an artist is a sort of crippled transcendence. He will "One Night Only" or rather one night at a time, since each performance suggests the next elsewhere, communicate with a new audience, fixing, or not, the body politic one bent finger at a time.

---

[77] Indeed in *Ulysses*, after exhausting all prose styles up to the present day in the Oxen of the Sun episode, Joyce moves to embrace drama as the most mutable of forms in the Circe episode. For further comparisons of *Faith Healer* and the monologue form in the modern novel and Joyce in particular see Kiberd ("Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*"106) and Kilroy ("Theatrical and Literary" 100).

(Faith)Healing Molly?

Friel moves to explore more fully the consequences of his attempted "healings" when he very deliberately revisits both this subject and this form in *Molly Sweeney*. The back cover of the Gallery Press edition of the play even proclaims that "fifteen years after he wrote his masterpiece, *Faith Healer*, Brian Friel boldly returns [with *Molly*] to the same themes and employs the same dramatic method of soliloquy." Friel himself describes the play while writing it as "*so* like *Faith Healer*. A second candlestick on the mantelpiece; a second china dog" ("Extracts *Molly*" 7 January 1994, 162). F.C. McGrath states, "In form, theme, and emotional power *Molly Sweeney* resembles *Faith Healer*" (*Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 250). In a review of the text, Nicholas Grene also claims that "*Molly Sweeney*...is Friel's...*Faith Healer* revisited. Once again there are just the three figures, two men and a woman, once again the theme of the miracle cure" ("In a Dark Time" 25). John Lahr describes "*Faith Healer*...[as] the granddaddy of *Molly Sweeney* in form and theme" ("Brian Friel's Blind Faith" 107). In her review of a production, Kate Taylor similarly notes, "Friel...reprises for this contemporary piece a device he used in *Faith Healer*: the story is told by means of interlocking monologues by characters who never directly address each other" (A12). Yet, as Taylor's words also indicate, for all this emphasis on returning, Friel also sidesteps this return. This time the monologues will be interlocking rather than separate; this time the space will be "shared," at least visually; this time the focus will shift to the healed female character Molly, from the healing male character Frank Hardy; this time another revisiting, to Synge's blind couple in *The Well of the Saints*, helps Friel shift from a theme concerning the possibility of a "miracle cure" to a theme concerning the probability of the negative consequences of achieving that miracle cure.

Molly Sweeney Astray

But perhaps the biggest change, as Grene later identifies, is the centrality of Molly, of the female figure. Arguably, Friel continues the shift to focus on the female on stage which he began in *Lughnasa*. Friel notes more than once the importance of his decision on the character's gender: "Is the blind person a man or a woman? My *instinct* at this stage is a woman" ("Extracts *Molly*" 7 August 1993, 156); "Is she even a woman?" ("Extracts *Molly*" 29 November 1993, 159). Another slippage reinforces Friel's slippage in focus from *Faith Healer* to *Molly Sweeney*: Friel's alteration of his source, Oliver Sacks' case study "To See and Not See" which Friel acknowledges in an author's note in the Gallery Press edition of the play. In this study a woman, Amy, has Frank's role in the play, encouraging her blind companion, the male Virgil, to seek restored sight.[78] Given this source, Friel's choice of a female subject becomes all the more deliberate: in this play, he insists on exploring the effect of the male creating on the female created.

By reversing the relationship of the main and supporting characters in the latter play, Friel highlights this switch in focus from male to female. Frank acts; Molly is acted upon. Teddy and Grace support Frank Hardy and his "world"; Rice and Frank Sweeney impose their worlds on Molly. In Molly, or rather in her "disability," Rice sees the possibility of his own redemption while Frank sees the chance to make one of his

---

[78] The Hollywood film *At First Sight* takes precisely this story and enacts the inherent drama, providing another contrast to Friel's deliberate reversal of positions in his tale.

"passions" come true. Grene goes so far as to suggest that "there is something like a feminist fable implicit in it [*Molly Sweeney*]....The imposition of sight upon Molly becomes a metaphor for the imposition of male perspectives upon the female. 'Trust me,' said her father, 'Trust me' says her husband: she does, and discovers just how untrustworthy all these men are" ("In a Dark Time" 25).

To expose this male use of the female Friel uses both repetition or returning and slippage within the play as well. Each character echoes the others on the subject of the cure and Molly's potential gain or rather her potential loss. First Frank, being quoted or performed by Rice as Teddy was by Frank Hardy, states, "She has nothing to lose, has she? What has she to lose? — Nothing! Nothing!" (17) Rice then repeats this denial of potential loss, but so emphatically as to hint at the growing implicit answer already suggested by Frank's emphatic refusal: everything. "And isn't the self-taught husband right (*Angrily*) What has she to lose for Christ's sake? Nothing! Nothing at all!" (28) Indeed, Friel's rare use of a stage direction in this play at this point clearly underlines and undermines the passion of Rice's denial. Next, Molly finally gets to speak for herself, but only after the men have had their turn.

> Why am I going for this operation? None of this is my choosing. Then why is this happening to me? I am being used. Of course I trust Frank. Of course I trust Mr. Rice. But how can they know what they are taking away from me? How do they know what they are offering me. They don't. They can't. And have I anything to gain? Anything? Anything? (31)

Molly's repeated questioning "anything" continues the slippage denying the earlier repeated emphatic "nothings" of Rice and Frank. Act One ends with the final echoing answer, "everything," from Rice (39). The interval itself underlines this answer, giving the audience a taste of Molly's future loss by taking away the world of the play.[79] As Claudia Harris states, "Molly Sweeney loses her own self as a result of the pygmalion aspirations of the men in her life" (67).

---

[79] I have been unable to find a direct reference, but I assume that the end of the act also takes away the light in a further emphasis of the "blindness" which will follow the miracle cure. Regardless, the interval acts as a physical and temporal barrier emphasizing her potential loss.

Linking Molly to her mother and Frank and Rice to her father also reveals the patriarchal structure inherent in the play. In Act Two, when the seeming success of the operation soon turns disastrous, and when both Frank and Rice try to deny or ignore Molly's alarm (50), Molly's thoughts turn increasingly to her "mother and father, but especially...[her] mother and what it must have been like for her living in that huge echoing house" (51). Molly increasingly imagines the trapped world of her mother. Of course, Molly has already been linked to her father and, specifically, to her father educating her from her first speech in the first moments of the play. Though such teaching seems benevolent, her disability leaves her totally dependent on his views, both literally and figuratively. Later, we learn that he refused to send her to the ironically named blind school to learn some independent views, a refusal stemming from, according to her mother, a desire to punish her mother (58), but in some sense also he seems to punish, or at least limit, Molly by, as she suggests in the end, choosing not to exercise his economic power (67). The first scene also begins the testing motif that will be picked up later by both Frank and Rice. Her views must always be tested. The ends of Molly's first two speeches also serve to link her Father and Rice. In both cases (15 & 24), Molly finishes with a focus on her father just before Rice speaks: they cannot help but be in juxtaposition. As Carole-Anne Upton suggests, this juxtaposition works in reverse as well: "Her thoughts often lead her from Mr. Rice to the memory of her father, and the words of the two figures blend into a single voice. Her father's 'Oh, you're such a clever little missy!" translates into Rice's, "You are a clever lady!' (13, 42)" (350). Later, Molly links Frank to her father by calling him, "the first man I ever knew – apart from my father" (35). The linking dash seems very deliberate, and even though she also claims that Frank was the opposite of her father (35), we will soon see that in his desire to test, educate, and control her he is also fundamentally the same. "However different from her father he was, he assumed the role her father had played as her guide and tutor, and she trusted him as she had trusted her father" (McGrath, *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 268). Finally, spatially, Friel makes Frank's and Rice's patriarchal and trapping function clear from the beginning of the play. Molly may be the central figure, occupying centre stage, but Frank and Rice occupy the spaces to both sides "*for the entire play*" (13): they physically circumscribe her.

Friel also underlines this spatial male/female dynamic by having Rice and Frank fight over, or around, Molly. Both the males treat each other with disdain: Rice scorns Frank (accurately) as an itinerant dreamer, a comic almost stage Irishman, while Frank mocks Rice (also accurately) as a drunken pretender who tries to deny his Irish roots with an assumed accent. Both begin their focus on each other in their first speeches. Frank in particular begins his play-long obsession with Rice's "swanky accent" despite having Limerick roots (20). Starting with his second speech of the play, Frank emphasizes Rice's accentual airs by performing Rice, thus reversing Rice's earlier performance of him: "Rice said in that uppity voice of his, 'In theory – in theory – in theory – perhaps in theory – perhaps – perhaps'" (25). The mocking repetition here also pre-echoes and undermines Rice's speaking of these words in his next speech (27). Their performances as each other, with both taking the power of Frank Hardy, together with Rice's function as healer and Frank's name and their dual preoccupations with the possibility of authoring their own success, perhaps suggest that in this play they both take the function of Hardy to an extent: for all their fighting they are a combined faith healer.[80] Yet, even when Frank and Rice are both happy about the results of the operation, of their faith healing, and happy for Molly their supposed focus, Frank takes a moment to notice that Rice drops his "posh accent" during the excitement (43). In the end, with the battle over Molly done, Rice's "posh as ever" jibes no longer anger Frank (61). In this last moment together, after all the damage done to Molly, they don't even mention her, they merely exchange what for them are pleasantries. If neither of them have won the battle, still only Molly has lost. The men are free to go on to new battlefields.

Indeed, to some extent they already have. In their last speeches in the play both men devote their concern to themselves and their worlds. Frank moves on to a temporary passion about the badgers before he will literally leave for Abyssinia/Ethiopia, a land which will inevitably be, for him, one of his own creation. Rice too is moving on both figuratively and literally: he too focuses on his own world in two pages of text on his ex-wife and career (62-3); he too is leaving Ballybeg. The only glimpse of Molly as seen by the men is some desperation about leaving under Frank's final words (62) and Rice's comparatively brief description of his last regretful visit to her (64). In order to dramatically reinforce the commitment of the men to their new worlds, after several pages of short speeches, which compress Molly's time of "recovery" and therefore seem to hasten Molly's deterioration, Friel gives the men long last speeches about these new worlds. Friel's failure to give Frank some final words on Molly's fate in this long speech disturbs David Krause:

---

[80] In her article comparing Friel and Synge, Carole-Anne Upton notes how Rice as miracle worker takes the place of the Saint in *The Well of the Saints*. However, she also adds that "in his totalitarian reformism [Frank] bears most resemblance to the Saint" (348-9). It doesn't take too great a stretch to see that similarly both take parts of Frank Hardy, the martyred "Saint" in *Faith Healer*.

> Why then did Friel send Frank off on a new project in Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) at the end of the play, without a word from him about Molly and her tragic condition, completely ignoring his intense love for her? Why did Frank, who was so eloquent about his Iranian goats (18-20), so enlightened about his library reading on the sensation and perception theories of Locke and Berkeley (21), theories that might carry hints about Molly's disturbed condition – why did this passionate and probing Frank leave for Africa without a word about the shattered Molly? Why didn't her fate deserve as much concern as those absurd goats? ("Failed Words" 363)

But what Krause identifies as a disturbing failure on Friel's part is, I think, precisely the point. The men have the opportunity here to make Kiberd's "gratifying patterns" of themselves, to construct enabling fictions for themselves only. "Because both Rice and Frank were operating more out of concerns that fed their own egos than out of genuine concern for Molly, when they failed and Molly withdrew from the world, they both walked away with relatively clear consciences" (McGrath, *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 269-70). At the, probable, end of Molly's story, they have new stories beginning. Frank has a new focus for his eloquence and passion, he no longer needs to, or dares to, mention

Molly. Referring to Grace in *Faith Healer* – and Maire in *Translations* – Colm Kelly suggests that Friel fails to notice that "that one partner to this domestic scene is not altogether happy" (461) If this is so, and it is not by any means certain that this is so, then with the fate of Molly Sweeney and the male's lack of focus on it, Friel mercilessly exposes this male failure to notice.

The focus on male created fictions here echoes another part of the Frank Hardy/Grace relationship in *Faith Healer*: the males in both plays create fictions whereas the females in both are created. Grace describes herself as one of Frank Hardy's fictions:

> O my God I'm one of his fictions too, but I need him to sustain me in that existence – O my God I don't know if I can go on without his sustenance. (*Fade to black.*) (353)

In one sense, Grace's role in the play repeats these words exactly. She only appears on stage and gets to speak after Frank steps aside to allow her to do so, and what she says helps explain his story, his fiction, his authority. However, what she says also undermines his authority by contradicting his "fiction of events." Only Frank gets to speak from the death-space at the end of the play. Only he gets to explain himself to us and to himself. Yet, reading back from Teddy's scene, Grace gets to speak in a death-space of sorts as well. Teddy's pronouncement of her death throws her state into question: do we get a glimpse of her speaking before or after suicide, alive or dead? Just as with her assumption of Frank's invocation, spatially she takes some of Frank's power. If she is a fiction, she is one who gets a chance to explain herself and to challenge and contradict her creator, as it turns out, after death, although maybe not quite in the death-space.

Nonetheless, Grace does not fully escape her status as fiction, and Molly certainly does not escape the imposing fictions of the males in her life. On a larger level, the construction of women in representation in general, but in Irish representation and Irish theatrical representation in particular, cannot escape the imposing male fictions. Feminist critics such as Edna Longley emphasize the power of this male fictive force in Irish representation, particularly in those which fall within the tradition of nationalism, a tradition in which both women and Ireland as a woman are constructed.[81] Naturally, given Friel's status as Ireland's leading playwright and his involvement with Field Day, the critics look in particular to Friel's participation in this tradition. Unquestionably, critics like Longley and many others have identified real problems with gender and the Field Day enterprise, problems writ large by the omission of women writers in the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* and the (justified) firestorm of criticism which greeted this omission. Particularly, these critics identify that, by omitting women from their discourse, Field Day repeats the very repression and exclusion from which writers working under the Field Day banner are supposed to be trying to escape. Longley further identifies the long tradition of woman as nation in nationalist representations, and how, like socialist discourse, feminist positions become subsumed in favour of the nationalist stance. In his plays Friel has, I think, at least tried to retain the productive flux, the productive uncertainty from the Field Day manifesto, a flux which allows for many inclusions. After leaving Field Day[82], with his shift to more personal plays and increasingly to women as central characters, he certainly seems very determined to respond to such criticisms, at the very least by examining his own role in creating such representations.

In *Molly Sweeney* he does so by deliberately invoking the Irish theatrical tradition through the obvious parallel to Synge's *The Well of the Saints*. Of course many critics have noted the similarity between Friel's work and Synge's generally, and have particularly analysed the correspondences in these two plays (and also between *Faith Healer* and

---

[81] For example, see Longley's *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland*, and particularly the chapter "From Cathleen to Anorexia: the Breakdown of Irelands." See also *Gender in Irish Writing* and particularly David Cairns' and Shaun Richards' article "Tropes and Traps: Aspects of 'Woman' and Nationality in Twentieth Century Irish Drama"; and Kim McMullen's "Decolonizing Rosaleen: Some Feminist, Nationalist, and Postcolonialist Discourses in Irish Studies."

[82] Friel officially left in 1994, but even before that, both *Lughnasa* and *Wonderful Tennessee* were produced by the Abbey Theatre rather than Field Day.

Synge's work).[83] Many have also noted the connection in Friel's work to a larger Irish tradition: especially to the wanderers, beggars, tramps, cripples, and outsiders found in Beckett, Yeats, O'Casey, and even Boucicault. With *Molly Sweeney* Friel calls deliberate attention to this tradition of homeless often maimed seekers in his work and in the Irish tradition. By linking the larger image of cripples with a focus on the construction of women, aside from deliberately linking his theme with Synge's–that merely physical seeing is not understanding, Friel links the representation of cripples to the representations of women and, perhaps, to the tradition of woman as nation. He implies that both the woman as nation is crippled and the nation as woman is crippled.[84] Further, the linking of the theme in *Molly Sweeney* and *The Well of the Saints* suggests not only the lack of true seeing and understanding by the men in *Molly Sweeney* but also the potential failure to see by the male writers in the Irish tradition, by Field Day, and by Friel himself, when viewing and constructing the female.

Friel has been aware, I think, of both this potential failure of vision, and perhaps the inevitability of it, in much of his body of work, and particularly his recent work. As early as his article "Plays Peasant and Unpeasant" (1972) he argued that, inevitably, the

---

[83] See, for example, Anthony Roche's "Friel and Synge towards a Theatrical Language," for an examination of Synge and Friel in *Philadelphia*, *Lughnasa*, *Faith Healer* and *Molly*; Carole-Anne Upton's "Visions of the Sightless in Friel's *Molly Sweeney* and Synge's *The Well of the Saints*; or Declan Kiberd's "Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*" for a comparison of the play to Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*. Verstraete also compares *Faith Healer* to *Deirdre* (91). McGrath ("Language, Myth, and History" 537; *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 174) and Kearney ("Language Play" 32) compare *Faith Healer* with Synge's *Playboy*. Also, see McGrath, (*Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 276) for another comparison of *Molly Sweeney* and *The Well of the Saints*.

[84] That is not to say that Friel's linking of crippling is exclusive to women. Friel's plays are full of males who are physically, emotionally, or mentally damaged: for example, the split Gar (figuratively and literally) in *Philadelphia*; the feeble Casimir and dying and disembodied father in *Aristocrats*; the stunned Smiler and physically confined others in *Volunteers* (a play which as it is about, at least on one level, the deforming and destructive perils of nationalism, perhaps appropriately excludes women); the lame Manus in *Translations* (not to mention the drunk Hugh and divided Owen); and even *Molly Sweeney* itself with the alcoholic, divorced Rice and the adolescent, restless Frank.

"devotion to a romantic ideal we call Kathleen...will be radically altered" (306). Many critics have identified the mute Sarah as Ireland in *Translations*, arguing that Friel shows she and the country need only to gain the power to speak her name, her language to take her place as a woman/nation. While such an image must be deliberate given the theme of the play, the play's place in the Irish tradition, and its status as the first Field Day play, Friel also flanks Sarah's initial triumphant saying of her name with the lame Manus, the male who teaches her, and the delusional Jimmie Jack. With such helpers, Sarah exhibits very little potential to transform into Cathleen ni Houlihan. Friel thus both asserts and undercuts the traditional nation as woman image.

In contrast to Sarah, Maire too could be said to represent Ireland.[85] After all, the hibernophile Yolland falls in love with both the country and Maire. At the beginning of the play, Maire is a strong, practical, self-reliant woman who runs both her household and her relationship with Manus, though in very limiting circumstances. Of all the members of the hedge school, she looks forward, wanting both to learn English and to emigrate. In other words, a woman constructed as capable wants to leave Ireland and Irishness as far behind as possible. Yet nationalist forces, or at least the conflict between nationalist and imperialist forces, quickly deconstruct her dream and eventually her self-reliance and strength. Yolland's love for her, for Irishness, also quickly turns fatal. In the end, like Sarah, Maire will be educated to speak her name, though in English. Far from her initial self-reliant, purposeful wish to learn English, at the end she wanders in, uncertain of herself and her desire, ready to submit to Hugh's education, not in order to escape but in order to futilely learn the language of a man who will never return. If, as many have suggested, Maire, and Hugh, represent a desire by Friel to adapt, to create an Irish–English, then that adaptation includes deformation as well. Maire has become more like Sarah, not the other way around. Maire is being educated by Hugh, who functions both as a repository of the old certainties through his speech and a subversion of them through his actions, through his deliberate closeness to the persona of the stage Irishman. To underline this point, in his next-to-last speech (67), given just before Maire enters to request teaching, Hugh makes both glorious claims linking himself to the classics (though he mixes the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey*) and to 1798. Friel deliberately has Hugh invoke the tradition of Irish eloquence and martyrdom. In fact, he deliberately includes a reference to the battle which Yeats uses in his *Cathleen ni Houlihan*,[86] in which Ireland is transformed from old woman to young on the strength of the blood of the Irish martyrs. But Hugh's speech changes from his rhetorical transformation of himself, his wife (appropriately named Caitlin), and Jimmy into gods and goddesses to a speech of confusion, regret, and retreat. Not surprisingly, a pub got in the way. In the play, Hugh's drunkenness always undercuts both his knowledge of the past and his suggestions for the future. Maire's actions here repeat the actions of Hugh and Jimmy in Hugh's speech. Hugh tells a long tale of going of to battle but getting waylaid by a pub and returning home. She, much more briefly, says, " I'm back again, I set out for somewhere but I couldn't remember where. So I came back here" (67).

---

[85] For a detailed examination of the symbol of woman as nation which particularly identifies Maire as well as Sarah in that role see Lauren Onkey's "The Woman as Nation in Brian Friel's *Translations.*"

Friel continues his focus on males constructing views of women in both *Making History* and *Dancing at Lughnasa*. In *Making History*, a play about the creation of a nationalist myth, Friel's main act of revision in the play is to include Mabel Bagenal as part of the narrative only to show that the reviser Lombard must act to exclude her in order to create a nationalist myth: creators of myth must only show variations on the trope of woman as Ireland, not real women, and in particular no real English woman. In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Friel creates powerful, vibrant, self-sufficient women, but, through the device of the male narrator, he exposes both their inevitably limited fate and who is limiting it. Claudia C. Harris grudgingly suggests that in the figure of the narrator, Friel represents his own male gaze on stage:

---

[86] Yeats' play has of course long been seen as a prime example of the construction of woman as nation in Ireland; however, see Susan C. Harris on Yeats' subversion of nationalism through the representations of the female in her article, "Blow the Witches Out: Gender Construction and the Subversion of Nationalism in Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *On Baile's Strand*."

> Placing Michael on stage as his stand-in is at least Friel's recognition that this play is his own particular view of the events of that magic summer. Women have actually expressed relief that rather than Friel presenting these women as he usually does–"This is the way they are"–Michael's presence makes it clear that here Friel is saying–"This is the way I see them." In contrast to his other work, *Dancing at Lughnasa* is an open, honest representation of the male gaze. (71)

She goes on to note that in the dance or moment of "pure theatre" (43-4) Friel does allow actresses room to be powerful, but that only women could make them so: "Friel can write the scene; he can even identify the emotion; but it takes women to embody such action, such orgasmic pleasure, such *jouissance*" (71). Friel's primary role, according to Harris, is to limit the dance, to end it and return to his male narrative. Leaving aside the problems of adopting a position attacking male views of women as constructions with a view of women as essential, a view of women by a woman which too is surely a construction, and a limiting one, Harris does identify here Friel's deliberate limitations of the women through Michael. What she fails to consider is that Friel is at least as concerned with exposing the limiter as he is the limitation.[87]

---

[87] Harris does say, "it could...be argued that all Friel is doing is sympathetically and honestly showing the limited circumstances of his women characters and, by extension, Irish women as a whole" (69). Yet, even if one accepts this argument, she argues that "the skill of Friel's portrayals also helps perpetuate his limited view of the gender role *woman*; thus his drama changes the way women view themselves. And yes, women must then work to overcome the constraints of Friel's artistic representations if they are to defined themselves as competent, successful, and psychologically healthy" (70). It could be questioned whether he has the responsibility, and particularly if he has the right, to create new "healthy" constructions of Irish women? Shouldn't his primary responsibility and right as an Irish male be to expose the role of the male, the limiter? In any case, as Harris's extreme praise of the dance sequence, her seizing upon it as a place of contestation of the gaze suggests, Friel both can and does create strong, healthy females and then exposes the limitations upon them. Also, as her praise, and the praise of the reviewers she assembles, implies, this moment of "pure theatre" or theatre magic transcends the limitations of the play itself: it both exposes the limitations and allows for an escape from them. Finally, Friel's echo of the dance in the last speech and swaying background does suggest a potential for movement, for women (and men), but one which

Finally, with *Molly Sweeney*, Friel brings to the fore both the male construction of women and the deformation which that construction causes. Karen DeVinney suggests "that in *Molly Sweeney*, Friel, gently and subtly, creates an allegory for Ireland's current cultural dilemma. Molly Sweeney–what more Irish name?–stands on stage literally between the twin impulses of modernization and romantic nostalgia, represented by the former international medical star Mr. Rice and the idealistic but hapless Frank" (116). One might argue that at the end of the play Molly gains access to a new borderless world, a world which she can and does define in her final words: "my borderline country is where I live now. I'm at home there" (67). Rice's final words support this thesis: "And I think, perhaps, yes I think she understood more than any of us what she did see" (64). Yet the conditions under which she defines herself and the role of her "admirer" Rice in creating these conditions undermines any easily positive image here. Many critics have noted that, in the first production, Friel directed Catherine Byrne as Molly to remain whole, happy, and unaffected by the travails of the play. Krause describes Byrne as playing "Molly on one level of crisp articulation and beaming smiles virtually throughout her whole performance....Only once, for a fleeting moment near the end, does Byrne's Molly seem to assume a brief countenance of depression, or a vague hint of what might be autism, after which she promptly returns to her crisp speech, becoming her smiling and unaware self again" ("Failed Words" 362). Friel as director, I think, insists on Molly being beautiful, self-assured, and seemingly whole, but her last speech which includes descriptions of her vanished sight and reduced ability to touch as well as of visits with her dead mother and father also reveals her returned disability and growing insanity (64-7). While Byrne's performance of Molly's continued strength and wholeness, as I will argue later, may indicate some hopeful possibilities, the fissures in her story, like the "brief countenance of depression," lurk just beneath the seemingly whole surface. Friel the writer contrasts this stage performance of a "healthy" woman with his story of a very unhealthy one. At the same time that this construction appears whole, it also deconstructs itself. Or rather, at the same time that Friel directs this construction to be whole, he writes it to be fragmented. By

---

is (accurately) hard to reach.

doing so, he highlights, as he does throughout the play, both the construction and the constructor, and the associated gender roles. Friel's creation of a "whole" woman must, in the social circumstances in which she lives, also deform her at the same time. Similarly, Molly as a representative of woman as Ireland suggests an imagined whole symbolic beauty, but one that is, just beneath the surface, crippled and insane. "As a foil for Yeats's ideal personification of Ireland, Cathleen ni Houlihan, Molly becomes for Friel a symbol of an Ireland that has lost its vision: an Ireland with a faded past, a muddied present, and a blurred future" (James P. and Mark C. Farrelly 111).

The role of men as crafters of women seen earlier in Friel is made obvious in *Molly Sweeney*. In *Translations*, Manus's and Hugh's attempts to educate Sarah and Maire fail, or at least fail to create any benefit. Lombard, in *Making History*, writes Mabel out of existence. Michael, in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, limits the women even as he narrates them. Friel's deliberate calling to his earlier play *Faith Healer* forces a comparison between Frank Hardy's treatment of Grace and the treatment of Molly by Frank Sweeney and Mr. Rice. The latter play makes explicit the responsibilities and deleterious effects of the males in imposing their fictions on the female. The linking with the former play underlines the role of the artist/writer figure in such creations. Friel moves from the healer to the healed as central figure in these two plays, and if the healer risks martyrdom then the healed risks utter destruction. The very role of the healer may ensure this destruction. This male viewpoint may inevitably lead to a crippled world.[88] Friel, in *Molly Sweeney*, writes (and directs) large his suspicions about his own role as healer and his effect on the healed, particularly women, nation, and woman as nation.

The Healed?

---

[88] Friel's most recent original play, *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* underlines these roles once again. Tom, the father and writer, refuses to leave both his writings and his daughter whom he, at the beginning and end of the play, describes as an "elegant young woman...beautiful and mysterious as ever" (11, 82), deliberately refusing to see her insanity beneath the surface vision he creates of her, despite being constantly aware of it.

Friel underlines the effect of this viewpoint in *Molly Sweeney* by returning to and departing from his theatrical techniques in *Faith Healer*. Friel shows seemingly less concern with theatrical presentation in *Molly Sweeney*– the stage directions are even more minimal; however, three crucial directions appear before the first word of spoken text: he suggests the characters' positions with Rice on audience left, Molly in the centre, and Frank on the right; he states that all three must be on stage at all times; and he dictates that Molly must be portrayed in a certain way.

Rice's position, down stage left (actually down stage right), echoes Frank Hardy's in *Faith Healer* and Michael's in *Lughnasa*. This positioning may underline the similarities and overlap in the healer/narrator/ storyteller role in Friel's plays. Rice also explicitly links his function, his healing, to performance and so to the importance of healing and performance in *Faith Healer*:

> When I look back over my working life I suppose I must have done thousands of operations. Sorry – performed. Bloomstein always corrected me on that: 'Come on, you bloody bogman! We're not mechanics. We're artists. We Perform.' (*He shrugs his shoulders in dismissal*) (46)

At the same time as he makes the claim however, his action, given in one of Friel's very infrequent stage directions, dismisses the effectiveness of such performance, the truth of such a claim. Despite such a dismissal Rice then immediately shifts to describing his operation on Molly as a performance, but, as it turns out, a performance to benefit him not her, the performer not the audience:

> The darkness miraculously lifted, and I performed – I watched myself do it – I performed so assuredly and with such skill, so elegantly, so efficiently, so economically....Suddenly, miraculously all the gifts, all the gifts were mine again, abundantly mine, joyously mine; and on that blustery October morning I had such a feeling of mastery and – how can I put it? – such a sense of playfulness for God's sake that I knew I was restored. (47-8)

Like Frank Hardy, when Rice feels the mastery he can perform his miracles, but Rice does so, more obviously, for himself. He is his own audience. He even "watches himself," and, ultimately, heals himself, not his patient. Performance in this play thus becomes either dismissed as totally ineffectual or seen as self-serving for the performer. It even becomes dangerous for the patient or the audience, the ones being performed on.

Friel further emphasizes the healing performance at the core of this play by having Frank speak in newspaper headlines, one fantasy, one real, about the central events. Initially Frank envisions a positive "review" of the miracle performance:

> *Miracle of Molly Sweeney. Gift of sight restored to middle-aged woman. 'I've been given a new world,' says Mrs. Sweeney. Unemployed husband cries openly.* (26)

Meant to bolster Frank's vision of events, and even created by him, the lines also undermine both him and his vision. The lines come across as tabloid headlines and so, of course, sensational rather than truthful: Molly's "new world" line should be in quotes, but they should be in shudder quotes as we shall come to see. Furthermore, the last part of the headline reveals Frank in his, at least, co-starring role; in what should be her story he has the last word. When the actual "review," the actual headline comes, it reveals what was inevitable under the surface of this first one: "*Miracle Cure False Dawn. Molly sulks in darkness. Husband drowns sorrows in pub*" (57). Performances in this play, with these self-obsessed players, can only go badly.

Rice's position also underscores the dual theatrical and literary nature of the work. We read the stage as we do a book from audience left to audience right (stage right to left), so the narrator, the source of words, is the first thing we see. The response to *Molly Sweeney* echoes the response to *Faith Healer*: once again critics debate the theatrical versus literary merits of the work. In his 1995 review of the text, Nicholas Grene notes the divided critical response to the play's literary and theatrical nature with some praising the play as Friel at his best and others castigating it as "not a still but a stillborn theatre of the word" ("In a Dark Time" 25). Margo Jefferson tips her feeling about the piece in the title of her review, "Is Brian Friel's Ode to Molly Truly a Play?" She goes on to suggest, as David Krause does in his article "The Failed Words of Brian Friel," that Friel is "making himself into an antitheatrical writer" (H4). Krause outlines what he sees as the dramatic failure of the piece: "It is a story rather than a drama because Friel made the crucial decision to *narrate* rather than *dramatize* his premise and its unfolding; he allowed the three characters to offer a series of separate, if sometimes overlapping, monologues about their failed lives. They never talk to each other; they narrate or emote their hopes and fears to the voyeuristic audience" (361).[89] More recently, in his 1999 article on Friel, Grene, while not seeing the piece as a dramatic failure, suggests that

> this is the play that takes furthest Friel's preference for the narrated over the enacted, the imagined rather than the realised. Even more static than the monologists in its companion play *Faith Healer*, the three characters of *Molly Sweeney* each occupy their own playing area on stage without the benefit even of *Faith Healer's* minimum props of banners and empty chairs to stand in for a dramatic environment. As narrators they speak out of nowhere, demanding that an audience wholly imagine the drama they relate. And it is of course the drama of a person who cannot see. ("Friel and Transparency" 142)

On the other hand, in her excellent article on the literary and the theatrical in these two plays, "Monologue as Dramatic Action in Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*," Karen DeVinney argues that "their lack of conventional stage action is...exactly what makes them so dramatic" (110). Only by limiting perception to narration can Friel dramatize the problems of perception and interpretation: "Friel withholds such witnessing [of the actual events] from his audience here. All events are distanced by the narrative form from the direct experience of the audience. This forefronts the way the meaning of all experience is mediated by interpretation" (DeVinney 110).

---

[89] Such descriptions of the play and production abound, especially in American responses to the play, echoing the reception of *Faith Healer*. Michael Feingold, in his review of *Molly Sweeney*, dismisses it as "swatches of monologue that always seem page-bound, narrative prose rather than dramatic speech" (61). In her review, Nancy Franklin describes the production as "a staged reading of an essay, not as a theatrical work of the imagination" (95). Vincent Canby says that other than *Faith Healer* this play "must be Friel's most sternly anti-theatrical play" ("Seeing" 17). And, in his review, John Lahr describes the play as "storytelling on a grand scale but theatre on a small one" ("Blind Faith" 110).

Having created this, by all accounts, extremely literary piece, Friel then also chose to control its dramatic enactment. According to Jefferson, Krause and others, Friel further limited the success of the play as drama by doing so: "And in another aspect of his ambitious failure, Friel's decision to be the director of his play means that he was responsible for the stage as well as the page" (Krause, "Failed Words" 360). Friel wouldn't want it any other way. He is in fact suspicious of directors taking control over the page on the stage. In "Seven Notes for a Festival Programme" he specifically outlines his concerns with directors and restates his preference for having only a competent stage manager (177-78). Such concerns led him to direct Molly, and specifically to direct it with a minimum of staging, to direct it to with an emphasis on the words, the literary: "Brian Friel's own direction of his play was austerely true to the overwhelmingly spoken nature of the text" (Grene "In a Dark Time" 25). The bare minimum of stage directions again has a dual function here: not only to provide the minimum necessary but also to suggest that only a minimum is necessary. Conal Morrison has noted that the best advice he got on writing came from Friel (and which advice of course is more generally given about writing): "Don't tell me, show me" (qtd. in Clarity E2). In both *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney* Friel shows the telling. Friel highlights the importance of the contrast between words and a pared down space, creating an emphasis on verbal creation or recreation of identity, of the past, of other worlds. By directing *Molly*, Friel enforces the importance of what Grene would call "the narrated" but he enforces it in contrast to the enacted and/or what is not enacted. Friel's crucial initial stage directions insist on the continued presence of all three characters and suggest the position of Rice, Frank, and Molly with her in the centre and the men physically circumscribing her. No matter what is narrated, in Friel's directed enaction "Molly...is [literally] sandwiched between two...forces" (Lahr, "Blind Faith" 108) for the entire duration of the play.

Molly's narrated story is sandwiched between the others as well. Structurally, *Molly Sweeney* seems to follow *Faith Healer*, with all three characters expressing their stories in their own monologues. Both acts begin with a *Faith Healer*-in-miniature structure, with the central character having the opening long monologue, followed by long monologues from the other two characters, before a final long monologue by the central character. Yet Rice and Frank Sweeney always speak after Molly's final monologue: until the very end, she never has the last word on herself. In words and on stage, the others are always there. In addition, the switch in this play from single monologues to "overlapping, contrapuntal" (Friel, "Extracts *Molly*" 15 September 1993, 157) monologues which almost become dialogue, almost communicate, underlines the ceding of control by the individual speakers. Rather than contesting the other narratives factually as in *Faith Healer*, now the separate fragments build upon each other contesting only by means of different perspectives, not facts, and the claim each speaker makes on the sparse shared space. These dia-monologues put the pressure on the audience to assemble the stories as one story and to assess the fissures within it: "From these monologues the audience must piece together its own perceptions, its own meaning, to understand the characters' sense of self and the reported relationships that exist between and among them. There is no surety or truth: only perceptions. All is meaningful and meaningless at the same time" (Farrelly and Farrelly 108).

Molly Sweeney, like *Faith Healer*, places pressure on the audience, but in different ways. Rather than evaluate the differences in what the characters say and decide who to trust, the audience must piece together the separate speeches and assess the overlapping near actual communication. In his review of the play, Matt Wolf describes the Friel-directed production as having "characters speak[ing] in interwoven monologues, occasionally rising to stand behind or near one another and share a vague nod or glance" ("Abroad: *Molly Sweeney*" 58). With this minimal added staging Friel accentuates both the closeness of the communication and the distance remaining between the characters. "More prominently than in *Faith Healer* this allows their interaction, or avoidance of such to become part of their characters" (DeVinney 110). DeVinney adds that "Molly herself, at least in Friel's own production, was the only one to look at the others while they spoke, even though she cannot physically see" (110). Friel's staging thus emphasizes both potential connection and essential distance: Molly may look at the others but she cannot see; the others may see but they cannot look or at least they refuse to look.[90] Still, Wolf feels that the audience's job in *Molly Sweeney* is too easy: "[Friel's] telegraphing of events panders to a public that might be incapable of fitting the soliloquies together in any other way" ("Abroad: *Molly Sweeney*" 58). Friel too expressed a similar concern in his diary on writing the play: "What is lost, so far, is the overreaching perhaps excessive notion that this could be a trio – all three voices speaking simultaneously, in immediate sequence, in counterpoint, in harmony, in discord. Instead I have a simple linear narrative in traditional form; with the language, sentiments and modest ambitions of *Faith Healer* – without *Faith Healer's* austerity" ("Extracts *Molly*" 23 January 1994, 162). Friel's concerns here reveal the importance of the contrasts, of the parts as well as the whole. When he stages the play, Friel ensures that the narrative ease is troubled by theatrical difficulty, by theatrical austerity: "the three characters keep rising from their chairs to give their take on events as they unfold. At the start this device seems strangely wooden, driving away some viewers by intermission" (Torrens 22). With this direction, and indeed with the limited staging throughout, Friel reveals the limitations on the characters already prefigured by their sharing of the space: all have their own spaces yet their spaces are limited by the others. All seem trapped in a narrative and dramatic limbo. Anthony Roche identifies the "affinity" between *Faith Healer* and Beckett's *Play* (*Contemporary* 114-15), but *Molly*, even more than *Faith Healer*, recalls the dramatic limbo of *Play* by, less obviously but still effectively, restricting the characters' space and movement. Friel troubles the audience, seemingly drifting in Wolf's narrative ease, with this theatrical limiting.

Friel also constructs or recreates memory in a different way than in *Faith Healer*: the play's structure doesn't follow the *Rashomon* technique with different contesting viewpoints of the same events, but instead offers a multi-faceted recreation of the whole from many different viewpoints. In this way memory in the play perhaps better mirrors the perceptual experience of the blind, a learning sequentially rather than comprehensively. Even Friel's description of his writing process suggests an accumulation of detail rather than a comprehensive vision: "And as I write each character it is clear that they can't be *written* but can only evolve, developing (and revealing) their characters and characteristics as they discover themselves" ("Extracts *Molly*" 20 December 1993, 161). In "To See and Not See," the case history which Friel particularly acknowledges as a source, Oliver Sacks describes Virgil's (the Molly equivalent's) attempts to see beyond details to the whole picture: "He would pick up details incessantly...but would not be able to synthesize them to form a complex perception at a glance. This was one reason the cat, visually, was so puzzling: he would see a paw, the nose, the tail, an ear, but could not see all of them together, see the cat as a whole" (123).[91] Frank, quoting Rice, sets up the workings of memory early in the play by suggesting that Molly needs to learn our comprehensive visual world: "We aren't given that world....We make it ourselves by our memory, by making categories, by interconnections" (22). Friel creates a similar structure in his story of Molly. We as an audience must put the pieces of the cat together to form the whole and, in doing so, be made aware of the pieces. In other words, Friel, as he often does, in a typically Brechtian technique, gives away the ending near the beginning, gives away the whole picture, and then proceeds to take us through an examination and awareness of the details, the pieces that led to such a whole. In order to make the play work, in order that it not be a "simple linear narrative in traditional form," the details, the pieces, the fragments, the voices must, as Friel puts it, "speak...in immediate sequence, in counterpoint, in harmony, in discord" ("Extracts *Molly*" 23 January 1994, 162). Echoing other critics considering the nature of the dramatic and the non-dramatic, Donald Lyons states, "If drama is dialogue then *Molly Sweeney* is not drama"; however, he goes on to suggest that "Friel makes us compose the drama ourselves, just as Molly must compose her material world" (A12). The drama is in our putting together of the pieces.

---

[90] Wolf and Devinney describe a slightly different focus to the gestures. Others, like David Richards, saw that "one character may rise and acknowledge the presence of another, [but] there is no talking among them" (C13). The differences in interpretation of what was seen in the various reviews of the play highlight the trickiness of perception even when there is so ostensibly little to perceive: in these receptions there is a further closeness and distance.

---

[91] See Christopher Murray's "Brian Friel's *Molly Sweeney* and Its Sources: A Postmodern Case History" for a detailed look at *Molly Sweeney* and Friel's use of his source "To See and Not See." See also F.C. McGrath's chapter "Blindsight: *Molly Sweeney*" in his *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* for a detailed look at Friel's use of Sacks and the Irish philosopher George Berkeley.

The space in *Molly Sweeney* suggests the essential divisions. The movement from *Faith Healer* to *Molly Sweeney* seems to be from a solitary to a shared space, but at the same time it is from a whole to a fragmented one. Moreover, Friel reduces space, reduces action to time. As Frank puts it in the play, "Molly's world isn't perceived instantly, comprehensively. She composes a world from a sequence of impressions; one after another; in time" (35). Sacks quotes from the autobiography of the blind John Hull speaking of his experience of time and space: "Space is reduced to one's own body, and the position of the body is known not by what objects have been passed but by how long it has been in motion. Position is thus measured by time . . . People are in motion, they are temporal, they come and they go. They come out of nothing; they disappear (125)." In such words one might describe the audience's experience of this play: space is reduced, words come and go in time, and the seeming connection of the characters by their side-by-side position ultimately signals their final disappearance. They aren't really there for each other and they never really were. Friel forces us to ponder whether this experience is somehow a truer one. Comprehensive understanding, successful interconnections can disguise the gaps which Friel constantly wants to expose. Fragmented may be truer than whole.

In some ways, Friel makes the audience's experience of this play resemble Molly's experience both of being blind and learning to see. In an epigraph to the Gallery Press version of the play, Friel quotes Denis Diderot on learning new vision: "Learning to see is not like learning a new language. It's like learning language for the first time." As we see this play, as with many of Friel's works, we must learn the conventions necessary to see it. Margaret Spillane, in her review of Friel's production of *Molly Sweeney*, describes her experience of encountering it: "layers of story falling like veils one upon the other, a single voice emerging cleanly out of silence, then another and another, the process of building the story hypnotic, both calming and thrilling, allowing the listener to feel like Molly's description of swimming: 'Just offering yourself to the experience–every pore open and eager for that world of pure sensation, of sensation alone'" (35).Yet, at the same time as repeating Molly's blind experience by luxuriating in the comfort of the words, the audience also must confront the seemingly non-visual visual experience of seeing the play. F.C. McGrath emphasizes a comparison of the audience's temporal experience to that of the blind, but he also allows for the minimal use of sight:

> "Like Molly's experience of the world during her blindness, the audience of *Molly Sweeney* experiences her world almost exclusively in the mode of *nacheinander*,[92] one after the other, sequentially in time....This is also the mode of language or narrative. *Molly Sweeney* has little stage setting. The only experience of the spatial or the *nebeneinander* the audience has is the simultaneous presence of the three characters on stage. (*Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 277-8)

The audience receives the whole stage at the same time as the cumulative individual stories. Molly's words, and the others', detail her breakdown, yet visually, as directed by Friel, she remains the same. Friel engages our sighted simultaneous perception to, in turn, undermine the sequential build up of the tale. In Rice's words, "seeing isn't understanding" (33) but, with the visual contradiction of the narration, speaking, or listening, isn't understanding either. Instead, the viewers must learn a new way of seeing that involves listening, seeing and an awareness of the contradictions within and between both: they must construct their memories, their interconnections from more than one aspect of perception. Once again, as with *Faith Healer*, the individual stories belong to a naturalistic world – the characters' views of themselves are Stanislavskian. But Friel undermines such simple views with a Brechtian staging which underlines the disjunctions between the stories and the staging of the telling itself, particularly with the disjunctive portrayal of Molly's continued strength despite her debilitating story.

Another difference in the use of memory in *Molly Sweeney*, as opposed to *Faith*

---

[92] Following Lessing, McGrath defines the blind as living "exclusively in the realm of *nacheinander* (one after another)" and having "no experience whatever of the *nebeneinander* (one beside another)" (*Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 264).

Healer, is that rather than contesting memories, all the characters have their own memories which often are not shared at all, or known only indirectly, such as Molly's memories of her mother and father, Frank's memories of his businesses and Rice's memories of his wife and career. Instead of competing with each other factually, their memories, their stories compete with each other for space. Each complements the others in the telling of the narrative, but each also trumpets its own individual significance, its own creation of an enabling memory and identity. Ultimately, the two men, having overwhelmed Molly's story with their own stories, move on to create new patterns of themselves, while Molly, the one in the middle and the only one open to possible communication, is left with memories and a pattern of herself disabled by the interpenetration of the men. The only audience uncertainty over facts comes in Molly's final monologue, when, as she says a bit earlier, "[she] seemed to be living on a borderline between fantasy and reality" (58).

Molly signals for us the importance of memory in this play and in this final speech by beginning it with a memory of the events from the beginning of the play (64). Friel would like memory to be an enabling construction, whether factual or fictional as he suggests with *Philadelphia* and *Lughnasa*, but in *Molly Sweeney* those constructions simply become too fluid. In his preface to *Island of the Colour Blind*, Oliver Sacks describes the function of memory as Friel would like to see it: "memory...is never a simple recording or reproduction, but an active process of recategorization–of reconstruction, of imagination, determined by our own values and perspectives" (xi-xii). Instead of a comprehensive and enabling reconstruction, Molly lies awash in over-construction: she moves between what seem to be clearly factual real memories, like the one of Rice at the beginning of the events and one of a letter from Frank, and memories that seem real but that clearly must be fantasies of her dead mother and father visiting her.[93] Her final words are inundated with fragments: question marks, dashes, and ellipses signal the liminal nature of her "borderline country" (67). If we compare this final speech to earlier ones in the play we find that the direct, detailed, specific speaker, the only one who didn't digress, and indeed the most observant of the three, is gone. John Lahr suggests that in this final speech "these fantasies and the facts about Frank's newest adventure, in Ethiopia, are woven seamlessly together in her translucent monologue" ("Blind Faith" 110). While Lahr praises the blurring of fantasy and reality, he fails to appreciate the cost: neither she nor we can readily distinguish which is which. Light may pass through her but there is no guarantee that anything remains on the other side of the translucence that Molly has become.

---

[93] See McGrath, *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 272-5 for a detailed weighing of the truth or falsity of these memories, but in the end McGrath notes too that "it does not matter what actually happened, what did not happen, or what may have happened. All three categories of events constitute Molly's condition at this point" (275).

Molly Sweeney and *Faith Healer*, the plays, and Molly Sweeney and Frank Hardy, the characters, seem to end similarly in both hope and despair or in a sort of limbo between hope and despair. By renouncing chance, Frank Hardy in *Faith Healer* may be giving up diversity and embracing oblivion but he also gains the power of the writer to define himself. On the other hand, Molly in *Molly Sweeney*, despite her continued life beyond the play, is forced to embrace too much diversity. She must live in the confusion and despair of the written, of those unable to define themselves. In their article "Ireland Facing the Void: The Emergence of Meaninglessness in the Works of Brian Friel" James P. Farrelly and Mark C. Farrelly contend that Frank Hardy undergoes a true dramatic transformation by accepting his tragic fate [94] while the "random structure of *Molly Sweeney* and Molly's own unresolved story preclude any such transformation for Molly [even though she] speaks...the final word in 'her own play'" (111).While I agree that at the end of the play Molly lacks the ability to resolve her story, the structure which prepares for this inability is far from random. The play instead consists of a series of struggles for perceptual sovereignty which lead to accumulated attacks on Molly's identity and her ability to construct that identity and which now, at the end, coalesce in the near rambling of Molly between fantasy and reality. In other words, the structure has methodically prepared for Molly to be random at this point as a part of the unravelling of her identity, ensuring that she cannot finish her story and that she cannot cathartically transform.

---

[94] They also claim that the audience undergoes this tragic acceptance by renouncing chance along with Frank (111), but, as I have argued earlier, Friel balances such a satisfactory catharsis of the character with the refusal of the play to resolve and renounce chance: the audience must go beyond Frank's simple renunciation.

Instead, with the last words of the play, Friel has Molly claim for herself a new "borderline world."

> I think I see nothing at all now. But I'm not absolutely sure of that. Anyhow my borderline country is where I live now. I'm at home there. Well . . . at ease there. It certainly doesn't worry me anymore that what I think I see may be fantasy or indeed what I take to be imagined may very well be real – what's Frank's term? – external reality. Real – imagined – fact – fiction – fantasy – reality – there it seems to be. And it seems to be alright. And why should I question any of it anymore? (67)

Some might claim this new borderline world to be the fulfilment of Friel's Field Day ideals of creating a new artistic space, a dramatic version of the fifth province, a positive response to Rice's hopes that Molly had composed "another life that was neither sighted nor unsighted, somewhere...beyond disappointment" (59), a place where "she understood more than any of us what she did see" (64). Yet Friel's constant undermining of Rice's credibility, as well as the constant tearing away of both of Molly's worlds hardly suggest such a sanguine view of this ending. Friel deliberately transforms the ending of his play from his source "To See and Not See," making Molly's ending deliberately more problematic than Virgil's, deliberately leaving her caught in a new "borderline world." Sacks ends his study with a description of Virgil "between two worlds, at home in neither–a torment from which no escape seemed possible. But then, paradoxically, a release was given in the form of a second and now final blindness....Now...Virgil is allowed to...return to his own true being, the intimate concentrated world of the senses that had been his home for almost fifty years" (148). Friel will not allow Molly any such easy consolation. She is instead, as she says, "living on a borderline between fantasy and reality" (58). Friel normally approves of the productiveness of flux, of uncertainty, but in this case Molly, like others in similar case studies "may find [herself] completely lost, at sea, in this flux of appearances, which for [her] is not yet securely anchored to a world of objects, a world of space" (Sacks, "To See and Not See" 128 n. 7). This ending suggests that it will be very hard for Molly to ever securely anchor herself. Indeed, Christopher Murray compares Molly's fate with Cass Maguire's in *The Loves of Cass Maguire*, suggesting that she finds her home in "no home but a twilight zone....Thus Molly ends up deranged" ("Brian Friel's *Molly Sweeney*" 89). James and Mark Farrelly suggest that with such endings in plays like *Molly Sweeney* Friel "castigate[s] the Irish for their blindness in clinging to their inherited vision of Irishness in this postmodern 'otherworld' they now call home" (113). But Friel goes to great pains to make that "otherworld" so unappealing. In comparison to her formerly known world, her known identity, Molly has surrendered a sureness of self and space as appealing as the memory of dance at the end of *Lughnasa*. She has had to give up the world of swimming, "that unfolding world, and the sense of such assurance, such liberation, such concordance with it . . ." (24), and she has had to give up her ability, that so recalls the sisters in *Lughnasa*, to dance wildly "with complete assurance, with absolute confidence" (32). Of course the Farrellys might argue that the men in the play forced Molly out of that world long before she came to the "borderline country," and that with no possibility of returning to her origins she must make do with a postmodern flux, but Friel deliberately makes that flux unattractive in contrast.

> There is a held ambiguity about the play's ending and Molly's last monologue. At one level we have to be appalled at the almost autistic figure who is left permanently hospitalised, living among phantoms of the living and the dead in such terrible contrast to the pre-cure Molly whose sensory deprivation was so personally enabling. Yet the ending suggests an acceptance, even a validation of that solipsist world which defies the categorization of sighted men. (Grene "Friel and Transparency" 143)

Friel wants to create a place on the border to Molly's "borderline world" from which he can both embrace and question the postmodern flux. Friel wants to place himself outside the given power structures, the given discourses, the given borders, and wants to embrace the power of the "borderline country," but not at the cost of entirely giving up on notions of identity entirely. At the end of the play Molly Sweeney exists in a limbo "borderline country" in which she can easily negotiate her own definitions of fantasy and reality, but to what end? She becomes too liminal, too contingent. *Molly Sweeney* continues emphatically the slippage technique of *Lughnasa* where the movement between levels or modes of narration and enaction allowed for an awareness and acceptance of a fictional memory; but Molly simply goes too far–she accepts any memory, factual or fictional, without any ability to distinguish them or their varying degrees of fact and fiction. Rather than embrace Molly's "borderline world" wholeheartedly, Friel wants to remain liminal about liminality, seeing both potential gain and potential loss in a complete acceptance.

Moreover, like *Lughnasa* as well, Friel creates a juxtaposition between enaction and narration which creates a sense of bittersweetness. This time, Molly steps outside of the content of her narration through the enactment insisted on in Friel's third important stage direction: she must only indicate disability in a subtle way. According to Catherine Byrne who played Molly under Friel's direction in Ireland, England, and America, "Brian kept saying, 'There will be no walking sticks, no dark glasses–I don't want any of that blindness stuff." Unable to find a way to convincingly render such a character, she took Friel's further advice to "sit down and do nothing" (Wolf "Catherine Byrne" 46).[95] Under Friel's direction, as I mentioned earlier and as many reviewers' note, whether negatively or positively,[96] Byrne playing Molly retained a suspended confidence throughout even the worst of her narration. The stage direction and Friel's direction thus belie the story told. Vincent Canby goes so far as to describe the performance as a kind of Brechtian *gestus*: "It's an unusual performance in that the actress must simultaneously stand outside the character and interpret it....Even as she is reliving Molly's confusion and eventual withdrawal from the world, she has to be a kind of informed commentator" ("Seeing" 23). Such a performance of Molly here also recalls Winnie from Beckett's *Happy Days*. No matter how crippled by outside circumstances she retains a kind of performative verve or glow in the face of enormous constraints. Once again in Friel, as with Beckett, when all is most bleak, performance can be an important theatrical signal of hope. David Richards records in his review the potential effect of that performance on the audience: "Whatever the images in her head – shards of reality or fragments of dreams – they fill her with a mysterious serenity. On her face, when you last see it, flicker the beginnings of a smile. Then the stage lights go out and the face follows you home" ("Now Starring" C16). Friel's direction of Byrne's performance may be another kind of reply to concerns, like Harris's, about the enactment of women in his plays. Byrne as Molly both undergoes a horrendous limiting and exerts a performative power.

---

[95] Friel must have particularly liked her portrayal of "nothing" as she was the only actor to transfer from Dublin to London to New York.

[96] The following are some of the negative responses to this portrayal: "As directed by Mr. Friel, she has been placed above her character's life, and from that height she gazes down at it compassionately. There is a nimbus of light on stage where a woman should be" (Jefferson H26); "Catherine Byrne, handsome and strong-chinned, makes a stalwart but resolutely unshaded Molly, equally calm and lucid in the throes of first love or final dementia" (Feingold 61); and Krause, "Failed Words" 362 quoted earlier (p.14). On the other hand some critics have taken the same portrayal very positively: "'She just glowed,' Frank says of his wife, and Byrne does throughout, reaching a luminous intensity even as Molly's inner light gives out. (Wolf "Abroad: *Molly Sweeney*" 58); "Looking at this wonderfully economical actress, we forget the character's victimhood, we forget the heavy symbolic burdens Mr. Friel has heaped upon her; we see a glorious, likable, funny woman alive at every pore and convincing us that she is indeed illumined by Wordsworth's 'visionary gleam'" (Lyons A12).

Indeed such performative power and the indication of it in the script leads to some very positive views of Molly's state at the end. Carole-Anne Upton suggests that "in her condition of "blindsight"...[Molly] discovers a transcendent world-view that is finally liberated from the value judgements embedded in linguistic definitions" (353). Others record Molly in performance transcending the stage space at the end and making it hers: "Unlike the other characters, Molly, as she speaks her final elegiac soliloquy, explores the stage. Her physical liberation is the barometer of an internal one" (Lahr, "Blind Faith" 110). Or as Donald Lyons puts it, "Only now, though, at this terminal pass, does Molly, alone on stage, seize the space, darting boldly and energetically all about its far and hitherto untrodden reaches, gesturing casually toward things hitherto invisible to her. At last she is at home" (A12). Yet, of course, she is not alone. The others, though they may have left in their stories (and the lights may have dimmed on the actors), are still present flanking her and circumscribing her from beginning to end. She may at last be at home in telling her own story, but it's at the cost of her sanity, and figures of the storyteller are still present still waiting to take it over once again.

Still critics like Carole-Anne Upton and Anthony Roche not only see the positives in the uncertain limbo of this final speech but also link this positive uncertainty to the Irish political situation at the time of Molly's premiere (Gate Theatre, Dublin: 9 August 1994).

> Given the context of Friel's previous work, and the backdrop of that apparent stalemate which prevails in Irish politics even after the 1994 ceasefire, Molly's transcendent and liberating vision must further be regarded as a political metaphor imbued with hope for a less partisan set of views. Her achievement is the paradigmatic construction of a harmonious homeland beyond frontiers. (Upton 356)

> The term borders cannot but have a political dimension....*Molly Sweeney* is set in the present and in the area of uncertainty that that represents. It too chooses the form of parable and, while addressing the immediacies of the 1994 ceasefire, also leaves itself open to the future and what may or may not develop. (Roche "Friel and Synge" 160-61)

Set against such optimistic visions of productive uncertainty in the play's final moments are the words of Friel himself in his "Sporadic Diary" kept while writing the play. On 31 August 1993 he claimed that one of the four fundamentals of the play was that the main character "goes into a decline and dies" (157). Later, on 22 September 1993, he repeats the importance of this fatal ending, this time blaming the men for her death: "The men force her to be sighted. The process kills her" (158). Friel's conception of the character's ultimate fate seems distinctly at odds with such sanguine views of Molly's borderline world. More pessimistically, F.C. McGrath explores at length the destructive results of the competing discourses of this play and of the metaphorical, and actual, learning to see in a new way, implying further stagnation in the north: "Read this way, *Molly Sweeney* offers a very pessimistic prognosis for the North that suggests that radical shifts in ways of perceiving and understanding often lead to fatal disruptions of identity" (*Brian Friel's*

(Post)Colonial Drama 280). Still, in the final version of the play, Friel doesn't kill her yet. Just before Molly's final speech on her world Rice reports that the nurse said, "She could last forever or she could slip away tonight. 'It's up to herself'" (64). Such a statement, along with her clear dementia, contrasts with Rice's (and some critics') later hope that she "understands more than any of us what she did see" (64). Nonetheless, Friel does not have her die within the play and does offer, through his direction, some performative strength to the character which suggests some hope, just very tempered.

In *Molly Sweeney*, by both deliberately recalling and reinventing the form he used in *Faith Healer*, Friel underlines his refusal in the later play to give the consolation of catharsis, leaving only a very qualified performative strength: Friel may have hope but, at least at the end of this play, he is not very hopeful. *Molly Sweeney*, like *Faith Healer* and opposed to *Philadelphia*, *Translations*, and *Lughnasa*, is not an "Irish" play, but like *Faith Healer* it too comes home. Does it come home to suggest that artists (and especially nationalists) ought to leave it alone but, as with Friel here, cannot? At the very least, the ending reveals Friel's grave doubts about the effect of the male storyteller on the female (and, in the Irish tradition, on the female as nation). He retains questions about his role as healer and her role as healed. She may get to tell her story at the end, to construct her world, but he's still by her side waiting to take over the telling (and disfiguring) once again.

CHAPTER FOUR: (RE)MAKING HISTORY

FREEDOM OF THE CITY AND *MAKING HISTORY*

The entire stage is now black, except for a battery of spotlights beaming on the faces of the three. Pause. Then the air is filled with a fifteen-second burst of automatic gunfire. It stops. The three stand as before, staring out, their hands above their heads.

Black-out

(*Freedom of the City* 168-69 – 1973)

When O'NEILL *speaks he speaks almost in a whisper in counterpoint to* LOMBARD's *public recitation. His English accent gradually fades until at the end his accent is pure Tyrone. . . .*

O'NEILL: Mabel, I am sorry . . . please forgive me, Mabel . . .
LOMBARD: For it was foretold by prophets and by predictors of
futurity that there would come one like him –
A man, glorious, pure, faithful above all
Who will cause mournful weeping in every territory.
He will be a God-like prince
And he will be king for the span of his life.
(O'NEILL *is now crying. Bring down the lights slowly.*)

(*Making History* 71 – 1988)

While maintaining a questioning of himself and his role as a "healer," Friel nonetheless does try to heal the body politic in plays like *Freedom of the City* and *Making History*. As with his search from *Philadelphia* to *Lughnasa* for an enabling personal fictional memory, in *Freedom* and *Making History* Friel searches for enabling public memories which, ultimately, can, like the personal, also be acknowledged as fictional. Martine Pelletier notes that "what [Friel] comes to realize as he looks into history is that the lure of fictionalisation which is so potent in the lives of individuals, also affects history as a form of storytelling" (188). Nicholas Grene also recognizes the parallels in Friel's private and public searches:

> What for the family are memories, rewriting the shared consciousness of past experience each according to his or her prescription, for the nation becomes myth, the legends which misremember history for political purposes....The play [*Making History*] as a whole exposes the fictive, fabricated quality of history, analogous to the fictiveness of the individual or the collective family history. ("Truth and Indeterminacy" 11)

Recognizing the parallels, Friel attempts to suggest a healing for the public body, as with the private, through a healing of disabling memory. Elmer Andrews suggests that "Friel's increasing preoccupation with the social and political nature of this project has promoted the search for a public role. Field Day, which he helped to found, was set up with no less an ambition than that of reconstructing reality"("Fifth Province" 30). Friel tries to reconstruct reality by reconstructing representations of that reality and particularly by (re)introducing private memories into public myth. By looking at Ireland and the world through the microcosm of Ballybeg, he insists on including specific materiality within the grand narratives.

Even in these two plays, set in the world of the public narrative, the endings return, as indicated by the closing stage directions quoted above, to the private voices within the public speech. These stage directions insist on the reality and materiality of the three mute private voices and O'Neill's private fidelities within the maelstrom of public representations about them. In both plays, these main characters, the three (Lily, Michael, and Skinner) in *Freedom* and O'Neill in *Making History*, win by losing. At the same time that public voices succeed in misrepresenting them at the end of the plays, Friel uses the public voice of the plays themselves to reassert their private stories. Friel's stage directions, as in *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney* to be ignored at your peril, insist on private discourses which contrast with the public grand narratives. Their being stage directions also indicates that the key to this reintroduction of the private into public representations is the theatrical form of these two plays which Friel experiments with, with varying degrees of success, in an attempt to enable his own fictions.

In *Freedom of the City*, Friel explicitly uses all the power of Brechtian theatricality to expose the hollowness and falseness of public discourses, yet the Stanislavskian core provides the audience with the "real" discourse which the other discourses had been covering. Friel reasserts the private voices of the victims at the cost of banishing the productive uncertainties in discourse which he had created, and at the cost of too reductively answering the question which the play poses within its confines. Surprisingly, in such a Brechtian play, his form lets the audience off the hook. On the other hand, in the predominantly Stanislavskian *Making History* Friel uses the large gap in the story in the intermission as a subtle alienating device to create an ultimately more troubling version of public discourse, and indeed any discourse, while still asserting the right and need to create such discourses. By showing the audience both gaps and how he chooses to fill in those gaps, Friel is able to explicitly illustrate the revisionist nature of history and implicitly suggest a revisionist nature in his own play, which he makes all the more disquieting by his undermining of truth making claims in a predominantly truth making form.

(Free?)Form in *Freedom of the City*

As many critics have noted, *Freedom* is probably the most Brechtian of all Friel's plays.[97] Yet at the core of the play are three characters whose journeys seem "real" and whom we as an audience clearly connect to on a more naturalistic, more Stanislavkian level. I believe that this contradictory formal structure helps to explain the differing interpretations of the play and why so many critics and journalists received the play differently from how Friel intended it: why for example Friel seems to have intended the play to be about poverty, yet people responded to it as though it was about nationalism; and why the character of Dodds the sociologist is alternatively viewed as a sincere voice of the play, speaking for the playwright, or as yet another of the lampooned voices of authority.

---

[97] See especially Ruth Neil's summary of Brechtian techniques in the play in her "Non-realistic Techniques in the Plays of Brian Friel" (353-4, 356) and Klaus Birker's "The Relationship Between the Stage and the Audience in Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City.*"

From the beginning stage directions, Friel makes the Brechtian superstructure of the play very clear, yet he also indicates its Stanislavskian substructure. The directions describe the play beginning with the three central characters lying dead on the apron, lit in cold blue. Then characters representing the media, religion, the courts, and law enforcement enter silently representing their functions over the bodies, implying the effect of their functions on the bodies even before any words are spoken. Just as such actions prefigure the words, the stage positions of the Brechtian characters (those on the apron and the judge on the battlements) surround the Stanislavskian arena where the characters will shortly play or rather re-play the last moments of their lives. Jent describes well the power of these Brechtian figures over the Stanislavskian characters: "Surrounding them, literally and figuratively, are those who, unlike Skinner, Michael, and Lily, actually enjoy the freedom of the city...And all of those surrounding characters use their freedom to produce a series of representations...of the events at center stage" (570). The replaying of the events by the characters at "center stage" implies a focus on the process not the ending familiar to Epic, and ultimately Ancient Greek, theatre, suggesting yet another level of Brechtian detachment.

Yet Friel's initial notes about the set and the three main characters highlight the naturalistic or Stanislavskian importance. In another of Friel's split sets, "the Mayor's parlour takes up almost the entire stage with the exception of the apron and a small area stage left" (104). It may be surrounded but it doesn't look like it's losing the battle. Maxwell may claim that "the stage is fluid" with "Judge and witness mak[ing] episodic appearances on the wall battlements above the main scene" (*Brian Friel* 100), but his own words imply the fixity and centrality of that "main scene" at the same time. The descriptions of Skinner, Lily, and Michael (105) clearly indicate their status as well-rounded "real" characters especially in contrast to the brevity of titles listed in the dramatis personae, which imply that the other characters in the play are functions not people (103-4). In a recent review of the Abbey Theatre's 1999 remount of the play as part of the Friel celebration in Dublin, David Nowlan notes how the actors playing Michael, Lily, and Skinner give "individually well observed" interpretations of their roles when, in comparison, "the rest are ciphers"(n. pag.). Referring to these others, Klaus Birker suggests that "we really don't have characters on the stage, but social roles. The people playing these roles have no private lives and identities; they merely fulfill functions" (154). Many other reviewers and critics have referred to the delineation of the characters in similar terms.[98]

Before the naturalistic portion of the play begins, Friel has both the judge and the sociologist Dodds address the audience in what seems to be both typical and similar epic fashion. With the judge's address Friel establishes the audience's relationship to the characters and events on stage. The judge addresses the audience as the tribunal, called to assess the events in retrospect, placing us in the position of judgement along with him, but, as David Ian Rabey notes, "In fact, the audience is invited by Friel to judge the various counsels for prosecution and defence who so earnestly attempt to impose their various inflated and mutually exclusive patterns of perception onto the trio's rather pathetic actions – to which the audience is made sole witness" (*British and Irish Political Drama* 189).[99] The fact that the judge gives us only two possible options, either premeditated takeover or spontaneous takeover but a takeover of the site of power nonetheless, also establishes the dubious trustworthiness of the official voices. Even though Dodds' address to us is of a clearly different and more direct nature and has a radically different and more detached content, much more a true direct address, the fact that the sociologist follows the judge, whatever Friel's intent, does serve to lump him in with the other voices "for the prosecution or the defence" none of whom give true accounts of the events to which we are "sole witness." In other words, as many critics have noted, we see in the play inner truthful naturalistic scenes contrasted to outer Brechtian scenes of false discourse. We see an immediate revision of private event into public history and are forced into an immediate reexamination of the discursive record. Since, as Richard Pine says, "we 'know' from the evidence of our senses that Lily, Michael, and Skinner 'came together' only by complete coincidence [and] that they did not 'seize possession' of the Guildhall but only stumbled into it" (*Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 111), we see that the mostly, if not wholly self-interested outsiders always get the story wrong, with the possible exception of Dodds, but I will come back to him later.

---

[98] See, for example, Wolfgang Zach's "Criticism, Theatre and Politics: Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City* and Its Early Reception" for a summary of reviewers' responses to the characters and William Jent's "Supranational Civics: Poverty and the Politics of Representation in Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City*" for a summary of critical responses.

[99] For a detailed examination of Friel's manipulations of the audience/stage relationship see Birker's "The Relationship Between the Stage and the Audience in Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City.*"

To underline the severity of the misrepresentations, Friel has the first act focus increasingly on the internal, becoming increasingly Stanislavkian, and building to a linking of inner and outer actions near the end. The more we "know with our senses" the more certain we are of the inaccuracies in the outer discourses. After the seeming coming together of the two worlds and times at the end of Act 1, Act 2 begins by reverting to an overtly Brechtian world (though the dim lights in the parlour as opposed to the blackness on the set at the beginning of the first act suggest that the internal world is gathering in strength). The outer voices get another chance to state their case, but now the disjunction between their cases and the truth has been greatly heightened. First, the complete inaccuracy of the Balladeer's song exposes the falseness in the patriotic appeal of Mother Ireland. Then, the Judge's gross misinterpretation of the facts exposes the lack of impartiality in English justice. In addition, by not having the inner three immediately respond to the outer threat, Friel creates a disjunction from the narrative imperative of the first act which allows for a sudden space for thought about the constructions of that narrative. Such a disjunction, such a playing with audience expectation, will be used to greater effect by Friel in *Making History*. Nonetheless, here it serves to prepare for the three protagonists speaking "calmly, without emotion, in neutral accents" (149), telling us of their deaths and sharing with us insights about their deaths and lives from a space beyond death.

Many critics have commented on the similarity of these neutral speeches to Brecht's *gestus*. As Gerald Fitzgibbon puts it, "The technique is reminiscent of Brecht's instructions to actors on the achievement of the 'alienation' effect and seems to have a similar end in view–that of forcefully reminding the audience of their presence in a theatre, witnessing not 'the facts' but a skilful fiction" (61).[100] Other critics have been disturbed by Friel's inclusion of this device here. Nicholas Grene, Seamus Deane, and Elmer Andrews consider Friel to be striking a "false note" (Grene "Distancing Drama" 67) by giving "up on [the] realistic speech" (Elmer Andrews "Fifth Province" 35) of the characters and moving into "authorial overdrive" (Deane "The Double Stage" 170). Moray McGowan, responding to Deane, doesn't see why this should be a matter of concern as Friel constantly has the two levels of characters and speeches in the play (293): the other Brechtian voices of discourse have prepared the audience for this Brechtian discourse. Yet Grene feels that this particular section goes too far, noting that "Friel as dramatist has taken over the role of interpreter denying to the characters their dramatic sovereignty, and substituting his own more articulate, more self-conscious voice for theirs" (Grene "Distancing Drama 67). Elsewhere, he suggests that Friel does so in order that the characters can express truthful insights about their lives (Grene "Truth and Indeterminacy" 15). Yet Grene's comments indicate, I think, that the problem with this moment is not that it is too Brechtian, but that it is too Stanislavskian. It appears to be, and function as, a moment of *gestus* to an extent, but, as Grene notes (as do many others), and as our "senses have let us know" the three individuals are speaking an inner truth in this outer form. The subtext is made text, the inner outer. Not the actors but the characters have achieved this neutral status, and by doing so they can finish their journeys, come to the end of their throughlines, reach their superobjectives: a knowledge of themselves. Lily ends her inarticulateness, Michael his naivety, and Skinner his cynicism. Instead of revealing the actor in the character and the fictional nature of the theatre event, in each case, these speeches serve to reveal the inner characters and the truth of their story within the other fictional stories. In a sense, by suggesting other possibilities of actions that they might have taken had they possessed this self-knowledge when alive, this moment does achieve Brechtian gestus by making the audience aware of other options than a fated outcome, but of course these options are for the audience not the characters – their fate has been certain since the beginning of the play. This moment does allow a non-naturalistic super-awareness and super-articulation beyond the Stanislavskian lives of the characters, but the play as a whole draws their words back to serve their naturalistic stories: to encapsulate the truth for us, not to make us find it or act on it. Michael Coveney's response to this moment in his review of the original Royal Court production of the play (27 February 1973) gives an indication of the effectiveness of Friel's choice here: "It is a heartrending speech [Lily's] and nothing else that I have read or seen on the troubles has so forcefully spelled out the futility and pain of the current situation" (49). By so forthrightly speaking the truth of the "futility and pain" of the troubles, Friel has already answered the question the play poses. Friel uses this moment of Brechtian distance to serve an emotional naturalistic fulfilment. Rather than expose the falsity in versions of reality in a Brechtian manner, Friel exposes the real subtext under versions of falsity in a more Stanislavskian manner.

---

[100] See also Niel 353, Birker 156, and Elmer Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel* 136.

Even the comedy within the inner scenes serves to heighten the emotional connection to the three characters and their stories. Both Philip Bordinat and Kathleen Ferris, who write articles on Friel's use of comedy, connect the use of laughter to the audience's emotional involvement in *The Freedom of the City*:

> Humor is the key to the play's effectiveness in the way it invites the audience's emotional involvement with the victims, especially as contrasted with the alienation of the audience by the forces of law and order. (Bordinat 90)

> The spontaneity and vitality of Lily, Skinner, and to a lesser extent of the more restrained Michael, serve as a stark contrast to the three murdered corpses that we see at the start and again at the end of the play. The enormity of the crime against them is brought home to the audience because we have witnessed the comic *elan vital* of these three innocent people.

(Ferris 124)

These words suggest once again how the internal world, reinforced by comic appeal, connects to the audience "in contrast" to the alienation of the audience by the forces of law and order," to the attempts at distancing "at the start and again at the end of the play." There is an irony here to Friel's use of irony within the play. Friel, I believe, wants to show that this comedy is attractive and potentially subversive, but ultimately ineffective and empty, that the comic response is finally inadequate, that the third level of performativity fails. Yet, in the end, while Friel exposes the comic voice as ineffective, the comedy helps support the inadvertently too effective personal voices of the three main characters. From the first scene of the three within the Guildhall, Friel establishes both an exuberant physical performativity with Skinner and a more traditional comic Irish blarney with Lily. When Skinner discovers the truth of their location he "*bursts into sudden laughter – a mixture of delight and excitement and malice....He races right round the room, pounds on the doors with his fists, runs downstage and does a somersault across the table*" (115). His immediate and almost instinctive reaction is to subversively transgress with both physical and vocal laughter this place of authority. On the same page of the script, Lily chatters away in a typically "charmin" fashion, dispensing the wisdom of "the Irish": "Do you know what they say? That that CS gas is a sure cure for stuttering. Would you believe that young fella? That's why Celia Cunningham across from us drags her wee Colm Damien into the thick of every riot from here to Strabane and him not seven till next May" (115). She too responds to the seriousness of the general plight with a deflecting comedy. Against the backdrop of the general situation of the time and the one created by Friel by revealing the ultimate fate of these three, Lily's sort of stage Irish comedy seems already tragic, a clearly inadequate response. She is, as Philip Bordinat describes her, "an inadvertent comedienne" (88). In the face of all her poverty and her soon to follow death, among her last words is a repeated insistence on the comic as a response: "The crack was good. Wasn't the crack good Skinner?" (166) The potential meanings of "crack," an anglicized spelling of the Gaelic word *craic*, illustrate the problems with her response. On the surface, as she means it, and in her "language," *craic* is a sort of *joie de vivre* or "comic *elan vital*," but perhaps more appropriate are the meanings in English, the language of power, which suggest both the division between their perception of their situation and the reality of it and the repeated cracks of the guns to follow. In the words of Kathleen Ferris, "The drama is a comedy played against [a] tragic backdrop" (123).

Of the three, Skinner most clearly and deliberately takes on the role of the stage Irishman, both within the action of the play and his life more generally. In the initial stage directions Friel says of Skinner that "he is described as 'glib' but the adjective is less than just" (105). Skinner's identity is determined from outside, and seen from that perspective as being comic whether or not there is something more beneath the surface. During the play, Skinner deliberately instigates, or commits by himself, the drinking, playing, and minor vandalism that the Judge will call defacing, defiling, and despoiling of the Guildhall (149). Inside, he is a publican dispensing drinks and quips, privately in this public house; outside, he is seen to be a (re)publican, inevitably dispensing bullets and violence. As Michael says of Lily's and Skinner's clowning, "You're behaving exactly as they think we behave" (146). On the next page, in response to the sudden demands of the Brigadier outside, Michael indicates the inevitable other way "they think we behave" by blaming the violence of "some bloody hooligan! Someone like you Skinner!" (147) for instigating all the trouble.

Skinner instigates the burlesquing of other roles within the play as well. At his urging, all three "don the robes of authority" (136), Michael albeit reluctantly, and parrot the roles of the privileged. "We laugh at the antics of the three as they find themselves within what Skinner calls the 'holy of holies,' the parlour of the Lord Mayor. Their crime is transgression. Much of the humor is based upon their irreverence, their desecration of power" (Ferris 123). Many critics comment on the potentially subversive seizing of power with this comic play-within-the-play, claiming that, at the very least, it exposes the distance between their real roles and the privilege of the roles they assume here. Ann Blake describes their playing as "hilarious" but suggests that "each [of the characters] in his own way senses the significance of the mock ceremony....The festivity stresses by contrast the pathos of their deprived lives, in their own city" (110). Richard Pine goes so far as to call it a real ceremony which transgresses only by having the wrong people perform it: "Skinner's masterly caricature of the council meeting is neither mimicry nor travesty: it is more an enactment, symbolic, mimetic, but also *real*....The only thing 'wrong' is that the wrong people are taking part in the transaction, people who should not be there, but *are* there" (*Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 118). Elmer Andrews claims that Lily and Skinner lyrically transcend their impoverished situation: they "momentarily achieve a powerful communion through their dressing up and play-acting" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 133). Elizabeth Hale Winkler suggests that "The skit which gives the drama its title, the play within the play in which Skinner confers the 'freedom of the City of Derry' on Lily serves to highlight...social discrimination....Such official ceremonies are so far removed from the ordinary lives of the Catholic citizens that they would almost never get to participate in them in reality" ("Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City*" 17). Susan C. Harris pursues the ramifications of the play-within-the-play in greatest detail in her article "Don the Robes and Taste Real Power" (29-30). She describes it as a real yet empty attempt at seizing power. She is, I believe, somewhat weak in suggesting that Skinner views it as a real way of appropriating power, as a real means to save himself, but she is strong on both the importance of the symbolic ceremony and its ultimate meaninglessness at the same time. Seamus Deane captures well both the intent and result of such gestures in Friel's plays. Describing Skinner and other Friel "clowns," Deane suggests that "they put an antic disposition on, partly as a mode of rejecting authority, partly as a mode of escaping responsibility. But disengaged in this way they become mere wordsmiths. Their language is gestural, being in effect nothing more than a series of mimicries, a ventriloquism by performers who run the risk of losing their own voices" ("The Double Stage" 169). Despite attempts at comic subversiveness, the comic response runs the risk of being dangerously empty. Elmer Andrews proposes that the powerful communion of this moment balances the tragic ending: "The play ends in death, but the possibility of fluidity and experiment has also been affirmed" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 134). He fails to take into account the self-reflexive comic undermining of their play-acting. The reply of Skinner's bookie to their clowning is ironically, and chillingly, appropriate: "He's killing himself laughing!" (130)

In addition to the role playing itself, the clowning with the many symbols in the inner naturalistic set represents an intriguing possibility of subversiveness from within. In his initial set-up, Friel spends a good deal of time describing the symbols of power in the Guildhall:

> The doors and walls of the parlour are oak-panelled, and at ceiling height the walls are embattled. The furnishings are solid and dated, the atmosphere heavy and staid. A large conference table with a leather top. A glass display cabinet....On one side of the door leading into the dressing-room stands a Union Jack flag. On the other side a large portrait of a forgotten civic dignitary. A grand baroque chair for the mayor; several upright carved chairs for his guests. (105)

Bordinat describes the difference between place and people as "a ludicrous contrast between character and setting" (88). Ferris says that Friel uses this difference "to contrast the luxury of those in power with the stark poverty of ordinary people" (123). In addition, I suggest, this contrast allows Friel to play with the symbols of authority as he plays with the roles of authority in the play-within-the-play. Once they become aware of where they are, the three immediately lavish attention on these symbols themselves. Lily and Skinner immediately puncture Michael's respect for the trappings of power (119-21).[101] Friel then has them play with the symbols at Skinner's instigation: they play with, for example, the ceremonial hats, robes, and chain, a ceremonial sword, the Union Jack (the most obvious symbol), and the Distinguished Visitors Book. In particular, when they finally exit, they leave Skinner's nose-thumbing gestures of the ceremonial sword in the portrait and the signing of the distinguished book. Susan C. Harris describes the importance of these symbols and thus the potential power of this comic subversion of them: "The judge and the rest of the "legitimate" power structure must maintain control of their ceremonial symbols to keep their power, and they know it" ("Don the Robes" 28). Playing with the symbols and roles of authority in the inner naturalistic world ties in with Friel's overall play with the discourses which the symbols represent in the outer scenes. Such play might even be more effective than the overt playing at the outer level since it is harder to define and thus harder to reject or accept. It both holds up the symbols of authority and holds them up to ridicule. One might argue, nevertheless, that this playing is necessarily one-sided as the only symbols being played with are those of the governing authority, offering another opportunity for a dismissal of the play as nationalist propaganda by those inclined to do so. Patrick Burke says that the donning of the robes, the parody of the roles, "points up the incongruity so fundamental to this play, between socially assigned role and essential identity" ("'As If Language No Longer Existed'" 17). At the same time Burke reveals the particular problem of the inner strength of the play by undermining his point on the effectiveness of the parody, on the potency of the willful undermining of the "naturalistic symbols" and "socially assigned roles" of authority in the inner scenes, by simultaneously insisting on a contrast within the play to "essential identity." At the same time as the play allows the three to parody the symbols and roles of authority it also reifies their essential, subordinated, natural roles in the very system they seek to mock.

---

[101] See Ferris 123 for a more detailed description of both the attention the characters pay to, and their attitudes towards, their surroundings.

In any case, Friel ultimately uses the death-space, the place of possibility, to reveal the lack of possibilities in the comic response. Throughout her article "Don the Robes and Taste Real Power" Susan C. Harris exhaustively explores Friel's creation of this death-space as one of liminal, ritual possibility: "This scene has liminal written all over it....It takes place on the apron...between the world of the audience and the world of the Guildhall; and it presents the characters in a dark and vague area between life and death as they speak, on stage, from beyond the grave" (30). It is in this space, in the "neutral speeches," with the added knowledge and detachment that this space implies in Friel, that Skinner dismisses the clowning response as inadequate:

> And as we stood on the Guildhall steps, two thoughts raced through my mind: how seriously they took us and how unpardonably casual we were about them; and that to match their seriousness would demand a total dedication, a solemnity as formal as theirs. And then everything melted and

> fused in a great roaring heat. And my last thought was: if you're going to decide to take them on, Adrian Casimir, you've got to mend your ways. So I died, as I lived, in defensive flippancy. (150)

As Elizabeth Hale Winkler notes, "It is not until the moment of his death that he understands that his own attitude of defensive flippancy is in no way an adequate response to the situation, and that deadly seriousness would be more appropriate" ("Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City*" 20). Yet it is only after his death that he has access to this insight, that he realizes the futility of this response; at the moment of his death he remains, as he himself says, flippant. Had he not died, then he might have transformed from a mocking publican to a serious republican. Friel here perhaps gives a forewarning after the fact of the rapidly increased IRA enrollment after Bloody Sunday showed the Irish how to be serious.

Lily similarly moves beyond performativity to serious self-realization in this place of insight:

> And in the silence before my body disintegrated in a purple convulsion, I thought I glimpsed a tiny truth: that life had eluded me because never once in my forty-three years had an experience, an event, even a small unimportant happening been isolated, and assessed, and articulated. (150)

"Friel allows Lily to transcend her ordinary limitations, her normal lack of self-reflection and articulation. It is of course a speech from beyond death" (Winkler "Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City*" 19). Only from beyond death can Lily escape her "charmin" speech and articulate cogently the emptiness of her life. Only at the cost of death can Lily and Skinner gain such insight into their lives. Now the tragic backdrop overwhelms the comedy, revealing, as Friel did in *Philadelphia*, the inadequacy, the emptiness of the purely comic response. But of course, ironically, the play has also used the comic to increase identification with the audience and so to increase the effectiveness of the very speeches which describe it as inadequate, once again inadvertently diluting the effectiveness of Friel's point.

At the end of the play, when the closing tableau seems completely Brechtian, the muteness of the three characters simply reminds us of their speaking, of the speaking of the truth of their lives in this play. "Lily, Michael, and Skinner have one release, *in articulo mortis*, from their vernacular to a heightened avowal of self-realisation. The play's final posture recalls it....The silence summons their 'last words' above 'a 15-second burst of automatic fire' (Maxwell, "Figures in a Peepshow" 56). Patrick Burke, who thinks that Friel's most "skilled deployment of lighting is in *The Freedom of the City*"("'As If Language No Longer Existed'" 16), says of the ending that "'the battery of spotlights *beaming* on the faces of the three' as they look out at the end, about to be gunned down by the army, inexorably compels audience implication in the political issues posed by a powerful play" (17). Burke accurately assesses the effectiveness of the lighting in contributing to the power of this moment, but he does not go on to consider the "audience's implication" fully. Rather than exposing all discourses including the one between stage and audience at this moment, the tableau reminds us that at the end "the tribunal's conclusions flatly contradict all the facts one can gather from the narrative scenes" (Lehman 434). Once again the Brechtian moment serves the inner truth, making it harder than ever to disagree with this, ostensibly mute, appeal.

Ultimately the play can be seen as an examination of many different official narratives/versions of the (f)acts presented anew as f(acts) to the audience in contrast to a private unofficial narrative or history. Many critics and reviewers have commented on this delineation of voices and silence. William Jent thinks that most "commentators have [wrongly] obliged...by mapping the play onto variations of the archetypal 'individual in tragic conflict with society' binary" (571). He surveys what he calls binary responses in Elizabeth Hale Winkler, Seamus Deane, Nicholas Grene, Richard Pine, and Ulrich Schneider (572-5).[102] In addition, many commentators have come down firmly on the private, naturalistic side of the binary.[103] Friel here has the same intentions as Eavan Boland wanting to bring in the silent, voiceless narratives from *Outside History*: at one level Irish into English perhaps but also poor into middle and upper class, and possibly female into male. In doing so he rejects the many narratives made of the events and also makes us aware of the immediate construction of misnarratives; but he doesn't sufficiently make us aware of the possibility of his own inner narrative being a misrepresentation, a fiction, since it is the missing truthful narrative underneath all the others. Jent argues at length about the irony of the critics silencing the potentially threatening voice of someone like Dodds by enforcing a strict binary which leaves Dodds no room to speak at the same time that many of them argue that the play shows false public discourses silencing potentially subversive private voices; however, Friel's favouring of one set of voices (ironically the supposedly silent ones) over the other has prepared critics for just such a response.

---

[102] See in particular Winkler's "Brian Friel's *Freedom of the City*" 13, 21-2, 26; Deane's "Introduction to *Selected Plays*" 18; Grene's "Distancing Drama" 64-5; Pine's *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 111; and Schneider's "Staging History" 81. In addition, see Grene's further elaboration of the binary in "Truth and Indeterminacy" 14-15; Ginette Verstraete's comments echoing Deane on the voices of power and powerlessness in her

Following Friel's own comments in an interview with Eavan Boland, William Jent argues persuasively for a view of the play that focuses on the exposure of poverty and not a division into real and false, nationalist and unionist.[104] He rejects the critical tradition, which he sees as a misreading of the central concern of the play and of the character Dodds in particular. According to Jent, instead of a contrast between the voices of the

---

"Brian Friel's Drama and the Limits of Language" 88; Ruedigger Ahrens' "National Myths and Stereotypes in Modern Irish Drama"; Desmond Maxwell's "Figures in a Peepshow" 57 and his *Brian Friel* 100-101; Ruth Niel's "Non-realistic Techniques" 354; Terence Brown's "'Have We a Context?'" 191; Claire Gleitman's "Negotiating History, Negotiating Myth" 228; Jochen Achilles' "Intercultural Relations" 10; George O'Brien's *Brian Friel* 79; and Moray McGowan's "Truth, Politics, and the Individual" 289.

[103] See, for example, Wilborn Hampton's review which states, "It is Lily...who emerges as Friel's true hero....It is Lily who speaks for the innocents caught in the middle" (B13). See also Desmond Maxwell, "Figures in a Peepshow" (61); Elmer Andrews, "Fifth Province" (35) and *The Art of Brian Friel* 134-6; Moray McGowan (301); and Elizabeth Hale Winkler, "Reflections of Derry's Bloody Sunday in Literature" (413).

[104] See Jent 575-6 and Boland's "Brian Friel: Derry's Playwright" 18.

powerful and the powerless, the play has a third voice, Friel speaking directly to the audience through Dodds, whom Jent claims is the most Brechtian character in the play. Leaving aside for the moment the question of whether we should read Dodds parodically or not (a bit of both I think), if this is Friel's intent, his form undermines it. By speaking for the poor, Friel removes the need for them to speak for themselves or for us to speak for them. Friel has already done the job, and very powerfully. In addition, the strength of the "truth" of the inner discourse tends to negate all outer discourses, not just the clearly false ones: Dodds can be and often has been lost in the shuffle.

Moreover, Dodds is not as easy to read as Jent believes. Jent claims that "it is quite easy to (mis)read the character as parodic" (574), but in his search to claim an authenticity for Dodds, Jent has to perform complicated qualifying manoeuvres to present Dodds as completely un-parodic. Jent begins by noting the techniques Friel uses to put Dodds in a position to speak for the author, a position similar to that of the narrator in several Friel plays. "Each time Dodds comes on the stage he remains in [the] 'small area,' which is completely outside the set proper, and speaks directly to the audience" (572). This position is of course the position that Friel has used for the narrator or narrator figure in plays like *Dancing at Lughnasa*, *Faith Healer*, and *Molly Sweeney*. Jent claims a Brechtian speaking role beyond the world of the play for Dodds, suggesting that his position and his singular direct "*addresses [to] the audience*" (*Freedom* 110) underscore his role as "Friel's proxy...not within the play but within the *theater*" (575). Such a linking to Friel, or to Friel's narrator's is not itself unproblematic. Friel doesn't tend to support either his narrators or himself wholeheartedly; instead, he tends to both assert and undermine such positions at the same time. Jent delineates how Dodds' position and relationship with the audience make him the most Brechtian character/device in the play:

> But Dodds' dramatic disjunction is both more absolute and more significant . . .; it is the device by which Friel seeks to induce a sense of Brechtian alienation in his audience, to maintain their consciousness of the distance between theatrical illusion and reality. After Dodds' first speech is

> interrupted by the sound of the British forces violently breaking up the civil rights march, which is '*deafening and fills the whole auditorium,*' he '*resumes as calmly as before*' (111). He responds in the same way – which is to say not at all – when his second speech is momentarily interrupted by the play. Following his third and final speech he remains in the theater, silent and unresponsive, until the lights go down. And the disconcerting fact that Dodds is wholly unaware of "the screaming and shooting going on around him" functions to intensify the alienation effect, and thus to foreground the reality of his appeal. (580)

While Jent provides a convincing view of Dodds' role in the play and how it is created by a singular disjunction, he fails to consider the potentially subversive effect of this disjunction. It could be said, as Jent does, that Dodds ignores the play, but it could also be said that the play ignores him. When he is on stage the important action, like the "deafening" breaking up of the civil rights march, occurs off stage. The viewer may be forgiven for considering off stage to be more important than what happens on stage here. While the disjunction gives Dodds a certain power it also may explain why Dodds gets no critical respect. His very distance at once gives him a position for speaking and makes that speaking questionable; Winkler's view seems apposite in this context: "If Friel's ultimate goal is to awaken not only intellectual understanding but also intellectual sympathy for the underpriviliged (sic) minority, then Dodd's (sic) role is an ambiguous one: his is a necessary cold and clear voice, but in his lack of feeling and involvement he is in the end closer to the establishment characters whom Friel satirizes" ("Brian Friel's *Freedom of the City*" 23). Or, as Gerald Fitzgibbon states it, "somehow the choric detachment fails to deliver anything resembling the events that *we*, as audience, have witnessed" (59).[105] In other words, distance provides both a perspective and a problem, a problem which is particularly acute given the overall form of the play. Since the overall form tends to privilege a sympathy with the actions of the inner three, with "the events that *we*, as audience, have witnessed," Dodds' exhortations seem to be too distant. His generalizations are not close enough to these particular events. Dodds may accurately suggest "that [the poor] often have a hell of a lot more fun than we have" (135), as is borne out by the immediate entrance of the three parodically donning the robes of power, but he doesn't consider the price that they pay, and that the play shows they will pay, for their humorous transgressions. Moreover, the similar, though less extreme, disjunctions of the other outer characters from these inner events make Dodds too like them as well; it makes him "closer to the establishment characters whom Friel satirizes." Jent identifies, accurately I think, Friel's intent in the play regarding both poverty and Dodds' role in transmitting the message on poverty; however, he fails to consider both Friel's habitual self-questioning in creating roles like Dodds and how Friel's form itself tends to undermine this character and function, even if his intent is exactly as Jent supposes. In the words of Ulf Dantanus, "The author's thesis that poverty is at the root of the problem is partly lost in the complicated structure" ("Time for a New Irish Playwright" 47).

---

[105] See also Grene's "Friel and Transparency" 138.

Structurally, the division into Brechtian and Stanislavskian halves, and then the subtle preference given to the latter, alters the intended effect. A survey of critical responses about the play's intended effect will reveal those alterations. Conall Morrison, director of a recent (1999) revival of *The Freedom of the City,* suggests that "the wonder of the play is that while it feels like a broad Brechtian flag-waving piece, it is actually a very astute, insightful, very detailed examination of the nature of individuality" (qtd. in Clarity E2). This wonder is also its problem. Morrison points out that once you get past the Brechtian, you find a play about individual nature, a play rooted in a Stanislavskian world. In his article "Criticism, Theatre, and Politics: Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City* and Its Early Reception" Wolfgang Zach records, as part of his summary of the many responses by reviewers to initial productions of the play, that many critics in Ireland, England, and America found the play too Brechtian.[106] Desmond Rushe went so far as to declare that "Mr. Friel . . .[should] try his hand at the despised thing, the well-made play" (qtd. in Zach 115). Zach does rightly recognize that the reviewers' responses were "largely determined by a predilection for 'realistic' drama" (115), but Friel's form here is also somewhat to blame I think. Again, the problem is not that the play is too Brechtian but that it is too Stanislavskian; the reviewers reasonably resented a Brechtian intrusion on their preferred form, a form which the play promises to too great an extent. Nicholas Grene suggests that Friel's "sheer virtuosity of technique threatens the central immediacy of experience which it is the purpose of the play to dramatise" ("Distancing Drama" 67). I suggest that the opposite is true: the central immediacy of the experience threatens the theatrical destabilisation of discourse which it is the purpose of the play to dramatise. Put another way, while Robert Hogan believes that, "although *Freedom* is more interesting than the run-of-the-mill thesis play, character does get sacrificed to thesis" (129), I think that thesis ends up being sacrificed to character.

---

[106] Zach also describes in detail the response to this play as a dramatization of Bloody Sunday despite Friel's assertions and wishes to the contrary (113-14). Ulf Dantanus also lists the predictably negative responses of many British and Protestant papers to what they saw as Bloody Sunday Nationalist propaganda (*Growth of an Irish*

Part of this sacrifice to character is a sacrifice of intellect to emotion, of distance to

---

Dramatist 157). They can hardly be blamed given the advertising for the play: "Most of the Dublin papers advertised the new play before its premiere by strongly emphasizing its 'being inspired by the Bloody Sunday shootings in Derry a year ago'" (Zach 113-14). The programme for the concurrent Royal Court production of the play in London lists the events of the troubles before presenting detailed diagrams of the events of the play, which of course never happened, including maps of the area, distribution of troops, forensic findings, and a diagram of the court of tribunal. Such a programme impresses on the viewer that the play is a "real event," inevitably closely aligning it with the real event of Bloody Sunday that would have been covered by the media using just such graphics. Many critics, including Zach, record Friel's attempts to distance the play from Bloody Sunday by changing the date and number of people involved. For example, Dantanus states, "Friel used various distancing effects. The first of these was to set the play in 1970, a fact which has done nothing except cause some mild discussion about why it was set in 1970 and not 1972" (*Growth of an Irish Dramatist* 153). As Dantanus, Zach, and others note, and as his attempts to distance it suggest, Friel had to be aware of the potential for the play to be read as a representation of Bloody Sunday. Even critics such as Winkler, who accept Friel's distancing from the events, see the play as responding to representations of those events: "we can, with some justification, claim that the play is a dramatic refutation of the Widgery Report" ("Reflections of Derry's Bloody Sunday in Literature" 412). Once again, either Friel's attempts to distance do not go far enough, or his invoking of sympathy for the characters goes too far.

sympathetic identification. Daniel Leary feels that in *The Freedom of the City* Friel avoids what the critic finds to be "the dangerous tendency towards icy distance of his earlier plays and permits – controlled and warranted – sympathy for his characters" (135-6). But Friel has not yet struck the balance here; the sympathy is certainly warranted but it is not carefully enough controlled. Elizabeth Hale Winkler examines the results of the intended balance at the end of the play:

> The final official report, so blatantly contradictory to everything the audience has witnessed on stage is placed just before the end of the drama, and is thus calculated to awaken in the audience a sense of intellectual thoughtfulness or emotional outrage which it should carry with it on leaving the theatre....Friel has in effect chosen a dramatic form which would seem to suggest detachment and impartiality at first reading or viewing, but has used it to convey his social commitment. ("Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City* 27)

Despite Winkler's characterization of an appeal to either emotion or intellect, the tipping of the balance to an emotional identification with the three allows the play to be too easily dismissed as propaganda on behalf of individuals against authority. The creation of emotional outrage is certainly effective, but a balance is still needed to successfully ignite both thought and action. In addition, *Freedom* fulfills our emotional outrage through the making and viewing of the play itself – we feel that it and we have already done something about it. The act of giving those silenced a voice conveys Friel's commitment but, ironically, also forecloses our commitment and thus the ultimate effectiveness of his. Echoing Seamus Deane, Ginette Verstraete says, "Speech in the play is desecrated as a distortion of reality: a lie in the mouth of the oppressor, an illusion in that of the victim" (88). If so, then what is speech in the mouth of the dramatist? The clearness of Friel's commitment, as noted by Winkler, may allow others to dismiss as polemic these particular words from the dramatist's mouth.

Heinz Kosok and William Jent argue that Friel tries to make a direct appeal to the audience in order to incite action. Kosok suggests that, by showing the powerlessness of the actions and, ultimately, words of the three inner characters, Friel makes a direct appeal to the audience to remove the oppressive framework of the outer world which he shows in the play. After this outer layer makes it clear that they cannot act, "all they [Michael, Lily, and Skinner] have left is words, and their words are totally ineffective, in sharp contrast to the highly effective words of both the Brigadier and the Judge. The author's appeal to the audience is obvious: in order to create conditions under which the characters could act in a powerful way, it is necessary first to eliminate the repressive framework" (162). But Friel does make their words persuasive within the form of the play; the very closeness of the characters with the audience ironically diminishes the effect of this appeal. Jent argues that Friel, following his source for Dodds, the anthropologist Oscar Lewis, wants to espouse a "better understanding" of poverty, so he uses "Dodds' . . .role in the play...to demonstrate an authentic mode of middle-class political consciousness, to incite his audience to a non-violent but nonetheless revolutionary act of advocacy" (584). But since Friel already gives the characters, the representatives of poverty, a voice of their own, he lessens Dodds' ability to incite the audience to act.

On the other hand Michael Etherton suggests that Friel explores here the failure, and indeed the inability, of the audience to act. He suggests that the audience, as in Ancient Greek theatre, feels unable to intervene in a fated situation and that their subsequent lack of intervention, ironically, ensures the inevitability of the fated events (168). According to Etherton, "It is almost unbearable to watch the development of the framing lie around the tragic deaths of three luckless people, yet we 'serious' people do nothing about it but marvel at the play's dramatic power....The play, at a deeper level, is about us watching tragedy, to talk about it" (169). Though there is much to admire in Etherton's conception of the play's consideration of the role of the audience, he fails to note that Friel, with the "neutral speeches," talks for the tragedy himself and so circumvents a confrontation of passivity with an answer which allows us to remain passive.

Gerald Fitzgibbon and Ulrich Schneider both argue that Friel succeeds in creating a balance between the levels of the play by reminding us that the interior world is also a fiction just as the constructions of the outer world obviously are. Fitzgibbon argues that Friel reveals the interior fiction through the "neutral speeches": "The humour, colloquiality of idiom, and apparent spontaneity of the dialogue in the Guildhall scenes momentarily hide the dramatist's hand, but he is constructing an alternative fiction....And in case we missed this important dimension of the play, the dramatist deliberately dismantles the naturalistic basis of the central characters just before the climax of the action" (60). But, because the content of the speeches serves to extend the naturalistic characters, Friel does not flag his own creation of fiction to the extent that Fitzgibbon would suggest. Ulrich Schneider states that "the audience turns into a tribunal of enquiry with a better chance of finding out what has happened. But the audience should bear in mind that what we see on stage is not the ultimate truth either, but just another fiction fabricated by a playwright by dint of his imagination" (82). Yet, at the same time that he makes it easy to see the false official discourses, Friel makes it very hard for the spectators to keep in mind the fictional nature of his central narrative, because we "know with our senses" that it is true.

Friel's closeness to the events in Northern Ireland at the time, particularly to Bloody Sunday, may have led him to allocate too strong a privileging of the inner over the outer, the private over the public as a way to redress the existing lopsided imbalance between the two in the public discourse of the time. Friel effectively spoke for the victims of such violence, while potentially allowing others not to speak at all. Even his use of comedy supports the inner world and the private voices despite his attempt to expose the ineffectiveness of the comic as a response by the oppressed. If Dodds is supposed to speak effectively about the problems of poverty in general and in response to the specific conditions of this play, then he, like the voice of the author, is caught in the structure of the play. Even the "neutral speeches," where Friel allows the three a super-natural ability to speak for themselves in the death-space, support the essential naturalism of the inner characters at the same time as they supposedly break it. Ultimately, the play is not enabling for the whole body politic because the central core of it is not acknowledged as fictional. Elmer Andrews claims that Friel rejects the "ideology of republicanism" by making *The Freedom of the City* "not a justification of terrorist violence, but an exposure of the bogus language of the corrupt state authority *and* of the equally bogus language of traditional Nationalist mythology" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 130). I believe that Friel wants to achieve this balanced debunking, but in a context where debates are inevitably divided into two opposing camps, by giving a "true" voice to the poor, to the powerless, Friel takes one side whether he wants to or not. Despite Friel's attempts to distance the play from immediate public events, the setting up of the opposition between powerful and powerless, and then using the form to side with the truth of the powerless in comparison to the falseness of the powerful, makes it easier to (mis)read the play as us versus them, poor versus rich, and (in this context) Catholic versus Protestant, Irish versus English, nationalist versus unionist, despite the many false versions of all the discourses of authority in the play.

15 Years Later

Both before and after he wrote *Freedom of the City*, Friel had concerns about being too close to the current political events while writing a play about them. In 1970 he stated that he hoped a play about the situation in the north wouldn't "be written for...another ten or fifteen years" ("Future of Irish Drama" 14).[107] In 1986, he described his early response to the situation in *Freedom of the City* as "reckless" and "ill-considered because it was written out of [a] kind of anger at the Bloody Sunday events in Derry" (qtd. in Finnegan 125).[108] In 1988, fifteen years after *The Freedom of the City*, Friel's *Making History* was first produced by Field Day at the Guildhall in Derry. Now distanced in time by those fifteen years (and in the setting of the play by 400 years) *Making History* is nevertheless a response to the then current troubles and to the representations of, and discourses about, them just like *Freedom of the City*. By setting the play in the past, Friel gained access to a distant time, which, as he says, is still affecting the present: "that was a very significant time for Ulster, that was when the first broad primary colours were splashed on the canvas. And what happened there is still exercising us" (qtd. in Pine 109).[109] In addition, by going back to this particular period, he was able to answer another concern he had expressed about writing about the Northern Irish situation: the need for a conflict of equals or near equals in a drama ("Two Playwrights With a Single Theme" 222).

---

[107] He repeated such thoughts in many forms and forums. Before he wrote *The Freedom of the City* he felt that the writer should stay on the sidelines: "I think his [the writer's] position is a sideline one, as against an involved one" (qtd. in Boland "The Northern Writers' Crisis of Conscience" 14 August). Responding to the question on why he had not written on the Civil Rights movement he said, "I have no objectivity in the situation; I am too much involved emotionally to view it with any calm" ("Two Playwrights With a Single Theme" 222). "The passages between art and reality are oblique and devious, the better maintained, in Friel's opinion, if the writer keeps his position "a sideline one." . . . The writers...require a distance, a perspective of time, before the imagination can assimilate to itself particular social and political events....The writer may answer his critics that he has in fact, unnoticed, written about his immediate situation in -- the phrase is Friel's – 'terms that may not relate even remotely to the squalor of the here and now'" (Maxwell "Imagining the North" 93-4). *Making History* may be exactly the play Friel is describing here. Richard Pine also summarizes Friel's comments on not writing on the "Troubles" (*Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 43, 105), before suggesting that Friel *the artist* feels he must stand on the sidelines and see himself *as citizen* marching past" (106), leaving the question of whether or not he did so in *The Freedom of*

---

the City.

[108] Other comments he made after the production of the play focus on his inadequate distance from the subject. "I think one of the problems of the play was that the experience of Bloody Sunday wasn't adequately distilled in me. I wrote it out of some kind of heat and some kind of immediate passion that I would have wanted to have quieted a bit before I did it" (qtd. in O'Toole, "The Man From God Knows Where" 22). "This play raises the old problem of writing about events which are still happening. It's the old problem of the distinction between the mind that suffers and the man who creates" (qtd. in Boland, "Brian Friel" 18). Friel's words here of course echo his earlier words from before the production of *The Freedom of the City* in "Plays Peasant and Unpeasant" where he acknowledges the influence of Eliot and his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "There must be a far greater distinction between the Irishman who suffers and the artist's mind which creates....The intensity of the emotion we all feel for our country (and in the present climate that emotion is heightened) is not of itself the surest foundation for the best drama, which, as Eliot says, comes from 'the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place'" (305).

[109] Both Werner Huber and Matt Wolf also note the clear linking of the present and the past in *Making History*: "The consequences of all this [the historical content of the play] can still be witnessed today as the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland" (Huber 165); "*Making History*...roots Ireland's ongoing "troubles" in the story of a tribal chieftain Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone" (Wolf, "Epiphany's Threshold" 16).

Many compare *Making History* to *Translations* rather than to *The Freedom of the City*. In particular they suggest that the content of *Making History* is a response to criticisms of Friel's manipulations of history in *Translations*. They outline the similarities in the plays between Hugh O'Neill and Mabel and Yolland and Maire as symbols for the English/Irish relationship. Maxwell adds that both *Translations* and *Making History* are oblique responses to "The Troubles" ("Northern Ireland's Political Drama" 2). But, comparing the two plays, Gary McKeone states that "*Making History* is unique in its examination of the actual process of recording history. The play probes the nature of history as artefact and the complexities of historical truth" ("Fact and Fiction" 7). McKeone's comment on the play's "uniqueness" suggests why it might more productively be compared to *The Freedom of the City* which also probes, in a more immediate manner, the recording of history. One critic who finds this comparison productive, Elmer Andrews, notes that "Friel in *Making History* returns to the political theme of *Freedom of the City*, exploring the discrepancies between different discourses, once again exposing the fictional element in history" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 202). The reversal of forms between *The Freedom of the City* and *Making History* suggests that in the latter play he responded to a similar concern by employing a different form. In addition, both plays being deliberately set in a more public domain than is *Translations* highlights Friel's particular contrasts of public and private speaking in them: *The Freedom of the* City and *Making History* are two of the few plays which are not set in, or around, Friel's fictional small town, Ballybeg. Desmond Maxwell says that "*Translations* and *Making History*...are set in a historical past, a crucial period of political and cultural change whose ubiquitous stresses are shown at work in a small, localised group" ("Figures in a Peepshow" 62). Yet in *Translations* the local group shows the pressures and presence of public discourses within the private arena, while in *Making History* he must reduce, as in *The Freedom of the City*, larger public figures into a more localised group in order to insist on private discourse in public dialogue.

Translations can instead be seen as more transitional. Friel himself has said, "*The Freedom of the City* began as a play set in the eighteenth century and was constructed around evictions....It was titled *John Butt's Bothy*" (Boland, "Brian Friel" 18) The setting for the play he didn't write closely resembles the one he later wrote, *Translations*, and shows in all three plays a concern with historical distancing. Yet *Translations* doesn't internally question the content of the facts, just the communication of them. Still, *Translations*, like the other two plays, does reassert private voices in a public history. Kevin Barry says of the play, "The dramatic impact of *Translations* depends upon this simplicity: those who have been silenced speak" (Barry, Friel, Andrews 119) But in both *The Freedom of the City* and *Making History* Friel makes this silenced speaking more explicit by examining the conditions for such a speech at the same time as pronouncing it. Ultimately, a combination of form and content in *Making History* leads to the most explicit speaking of the three, allowing Friel to avoid the "threnodies" of Hugh O'Neill and, perhaps, explaining why the play is less liked.

Making History draws strong condemnation from all sides as a play and for its message – and specifically, I would argue, for the way this play tells its message. The play draws much criticism for its lack of theatrical technique, its lack of event, and ironically given its primarily Stanislavskian structure, for its lack of dramatic conflict. Just as with Friel's distancing of time and setting, this lack of conflict serves to distance action, and these responses, or at least the reasons for them, have more to do with the particular way in which this theatrical omission serves to both emphasize and undermine the message and the form. By constantly setting up and then frustrating our narrative expectations, Friel both gains the power of Stanislavskian identification with characters and Brechtian distancing from events.

Making* (and Unmaking) *History

In comparison to *Freedom of the City*, one might call *Making History* the most Stanislavskian of Friel's plays. Yet it also contains, at its core, a subtle Brechtian distancing. With his form Friel tries to appeal to the emotions and the intellect without foreclosing the debate. Friel's choice of form here invokes a certain irony. Given such a public, historic subject, one might think that the form should be epic. Thomas Kilroy's play on the same subject, *The O'Neill*, first produced in 1969, contains many epic elements and focuses more on the public events of O'Neill's life, particularly his great victory at the Yellow Ford and his great defeat at Kinsale. But Friel chooses to focus on both a more private subject and a more private form. Lombard says in the play, "At some future time and in a mode we can't imagine now I have no doubt that story will be told fully and sympathetically. It will be a domestic story" (69). As many critics have noted, this play is that domestic story, and, I would add, the mode is a domestic form. Furthermore, the mode is, anachronistically, in that "mode we can't imagine now:" a staging of the play in a form contemporary to its events would most probably lean towards the epic nature of plays like Shakespeare's histories.

From the outset, Friel's use of a completely natural setting signals a Stanislavskian form. Though some criticize the play for a lack of action, the first act contains several naturalistic dramatic conflicts: between private and public duties, between Mabel and Mary, between Mary and Hugh, and then, after Hugh's private contemplation, between a putting aside of the private and a building to the public action of the Battle of Kinsale at the end of the act. But, after the quick blackout at the end of the act, punctuating Hugh O'Donnell's gleeful eagerness for the battle and leaving the audience with a promise of further action which we anticipate will be fulfilled in Act two, the battle takes place in the gap of the intermission. The next act begins with a radically altered mood following their defeat, flying in the face of O'Donnell's optimism. Such a jarring difference creates a Brechtian disjunction. Rather than merely having a lack of action, *Making History* has a frustrated Stanislavskian action. That which we expect to happen on stage, that which Friel set us up to expect to happen, simply doesn't. Some, like J.S. Torrens, feel that Friel does not stage this action because it could not be staged ("Why Theater?" 575), but looking at Shakespeare's history plays or even Kilroy's version of the O'Neill story reveals that Friel could at least have attempted an approximation of, or a proximity to, the battle. Instead, this gap in the intermission serves to underline Martine Pelletier's claim that "it is by turning away from the public image that Friel constructs his O'Neill, leaving a theatrical gap where the Battle of Kinsale should have been" (193): the intermission makes the gap physical. George O'Brien notes that "the play brings out...[the] irreconcilable between history made on the battlefield and history made by the historian" (117). By excluding the battlefield altogether, Friel foregrounds the historian's role, and, in this case, the playwright's role. This gap reveals the disjunction in the larger structure of play: as Christopher Murray notes the bulk of the play focuses on O'Neill's contributions to history only before they had begun and after they had ended ("Brian Friel's *Making History*" 65). In the words of Heinz Kosok, "Ironically, the events of 'history'. . . are relegated to the wings" ("Words *versus* Action"159).

By making the gap between Scene 1 and Scene 2 in the first act fairly seamless, Friel sets up by contrast the alienating quality of this gap in the intermission. Although "*almost a year has passed*" (19) between these first two scenes, the concerns of the conflicts established in Scene 1 are picked up quite seamlessly: How will Hugh and Mabel's combination of Irish and English in their relationship work against a background of people who do not want them to combine or believe that they can be combined? Will the Irish rebel against the English with the help of Spain and the Pope under Hugh's leadership? Time has passed but the scene largely remains the same in both focus and setting. Indeed, the changes in setting only serve to underline the continuity of the content. The room, now with Mabel's additions made "*more comfortable and more colourful*" (19), becomes simply a more balanced space for the two halves of the relationships: male and female, Irish and English. By having Hugh give Mabel a watch as the last action of the first scene, Friel does highlight the importance of time passing. His emphasis on time here will establish a continuity of moment between this scene and the next but also will alert us to the tricks that Friel will play with time later. Because Friel establishes here a convention whereby time may pass but content and focus continue, a sort of preserving of the unities of time, space, and action, the disjunction of the gap of intermission comes as even more of a surprise and is even more effective. The quality of time passing in the intermission is then radically different. By the time of the third gap in the play, between Scene 1 and Scene 2 of the second act, we have come to expect the severe disjunction that we get as the play moves greatly in time and place to "*Rome many years later*" (54). This second disjunction enforces the concern of the play with narrations. Now we leap to the heart of the matter. The gap in the intermission omits the staging of the Battle of Kinsale; the gap before the final scene sets the stage for the real battle in the play over the Telling of Kinsale.

Friel's use of lighting to end the scenes enhances the effectiveness of the disjunctions. Initially, he uses a "*quick black*" at the end of the first scene (19) to emphasize the giving of the watch and the importance of the Hugh/Mabel relationship. With this use, he prepares us for the next emphatic "*quick black*" at the end of the act (42), which enforces the excitement of the moment and leads us to expect, despite its more abrupt nature, that, as with Scene 2's fulfilment of the promise of Scene 1, Act 2 will fulfill the promise of Act 1. After the audience experiences the disjunction of the intermission instead, at the end of the first scene of the second act the "*quick black*" (54) becomes a symbol of the disjunction to follow. At the end of the play, the lights come down slowly for the first time while O'Neill cries (71). Whereas the early abruptness came to signal a rupture, now the lingering fade dwells on O'Neill's loss and Lombard's victory, allowing a moment of thought for the victory of the play itself: the lights give the audience time to contemplate the unexpected changes of direction and the reasons for them.

These alienating disjunctions enforce both a structure and a theme which focus on a contrast between action and words or, as Heinz Kosok puts it, a "juxtaposition of action and non-action" (159). By beginning Act Two with an image of O'Neill silently writing with pages scattered around him, Friel enforces the idea that words take precedence over action, as they do in this play, and that writing is an action in itself:

> *O'Neill is on his knees. He is using a wooden box as a table and he is writing–scoring out–writing rapidly, with total concentration, almost frantically. Various loose pages on the ground beside him. . . . He is so concentrated on his writing that he is unaware of O'Donnell's entrance. Then, when he is aware, he reaches perfunctorily for his dagger.* (43)

These stage directions opening the second act imply in fact that writing is the only possible action left to O'Neill, and one he performs with desperate vigour from his knees. He is quite literally in no position to fight. When O'Donnell comes in, O'Neill's perfunctory reaching for the dagger suggests that it is not a real weapon at all; he is more concerned with, more concentrated on, trying to use the pen to defend himself. Even the active O'Donnell immediately reports that the sum of his actions has been going to "see to...disputes–documents" (43) at home. O'Donnell slumps to the ground exhausted shortly after entering while O'Neill continues to write in silence (43), reinforcing the importance of the writing. Once again, there is no action left to the man of action, the only recourse is to the man of writing. Comparing the use of stage properties to those employed in *Translations*, Patrick Burke states that the "use of...documents, letters, books and maps...suggest[s] 'a paper landscape' ("'As If Language No Longer Existed" 18).[110] Such a staging focus in the play underscores the importance of the act of writing, an act which has been the subject of debate from the earliest reference to Lombard's history of O'Neill (5). From this point on, the war in words rather than action is set up. We see, as Kosok suggests, that the "writing of Lombard's history...demonstrates how action can be turned into words" (159).

Not unexpectedly, references to history, and the making of history abound in the play. When he first enters, Lombard refers to the document he is holding, a "thesis...on the Irish situation," in which he will argue for actions now based on his understanding of the past, his interpretations of history beginning "more than four hundred years" prior to the time of the events in the play (12). During the same exchange, O'Neill and Lombard discuss Lombard's intention to write a history of Hugh, a history that will be used some four hundred years later to justify actions at that time, that is in the present. Also in this early exchange, itself the beginning of the dispute over the telling of the story between the two that will continue throughout the drama, Lombard puts forward his definition of history as storytelling and historian as storyteller:

---

[110] Burke goes on to say that the "paper landscape" illustrates "a world of possibility defined by varying levels of abstraction from the existentially actual and, in both plays, injurious to it" (18). One might also add *The Freedom of the City* to Burke's list with its staging of the Widgery Report through the character of the Judge and with the importance given to the Name Book as stage property. Yet I would argue that the stage underneath the 'paper landscape' in *Making History* is not "existentially actual." Friel's overt focus on writing in form and staging combined with the disjunctions of his form which force even more focus on the written nature of "existence" calls into question any assertion of an "actual" beyond the words.

> If you're asking me will my story be as accurate as possible – of course it will. But are truth and falsity the proper criteria? I don't know. Maybe when the time comes my first responsibility will be to tell the best possible narrative. Isn't that what history is, a kind of storytelling?...Imposing a pattern on events that were mostly casual and haphazard and shaping them into a narrative that is logical and interesting. (8)

Lombard thus sees the shaping of history as Kiberd sees the shaping of individual memory in Friel's work: the making of a "gratifying pattern" that will enable the present. Yet Hugh – and Friel – also want to retain an allegiance to "the truth." O'Neill counters Lombard with his view of what the role of the historian should be by his continued questioning of Lombard, especially with the repetition of the line, "But you'll tell the truth?" (8) Such references intensify until the final scene of the literal battle in words between O'Neill and Lombard concerning O'Neill's history. As Katharine Worth notes, "the great book on the lectern...[now] dominates the stage" (74). Friel emphasizes the status of this scene as proxy for Kinsale through O'Neill's physical and vocal response to Lombard's history early in the scene, "(*He shuts the book in fury*) Damn you Archbishop!...this is one battle I am not going to lose" (56). Later, in direct confrontation with Lombard, as a part of the *agon* of the play, O'Neill repeats this description of the action of this scene:

> O'NEILL. This is my last battle, Peter.
> LOMBARD. Battle. What battle?
> O'NEILL. That [*book*]. . . .
> LOMBARD. Your history?
> O'NEILL. *Your* history. . . . I'm telling you that I'm going to fight you on that thing and I'm going to win.
> LOMBARD. Fight – ? . . .

7

O'NEILL. I'm going to win this battle, Peter. (62-3)

Their battle is so complete that they even fight over whether it is a battle. Later, Lombard does reveal that their textual struggle is the last action of the battle of Kinsale: "You lost a battle – that has to be said. But the telling of it can still be a triumph" (65). This war culminates in an unresolved verbal battle at the end with Lombard and O'Neill alternating lines from their preferred versions of the history. The play becomes explicitly a battle of words, not actions, and this is especially pronounced when compared to the on stage violence of *Freedom of the City* which, in the end, was supposed to be a battle of words as well.

Having a war in words only is one of the reasons that critics call this a problem play. Richard Pine says, "*Making History* is once again a problem play: a problem for audiences because it lacks dramatic impact, and for critics because it lacks not only form, but, ostensibly, content or matter. There is no story-line as such because the playwright is concerned with how the future will determine the events of the past" (*Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 210). Rather than lacking form and lacking a story-line, the play deliberately toys with both, initiating but deliberately not fulfilling them, in order to focus attention on the telling of the stories and the tellers of those stories, including Friel himself as historian and playwright. The play "can be read not only as a comment on the falsifying processes of historical writing but also as a debate on the role of the creative writer, and in particular the dramatist" (Kosok 159). Instead of dismissing the power of all chroniclers as insufficient, as Fintan O'Toole claims ("Marking Time" 205), by deliberately playing with form to make it reflexive on the nature of writing and particularly on the nature of writing fiction and history, Friel both wants to question Lombard's power in writing historical discourses and to expropriate it for his own purposes. O'Toole argues that "Brian Friel does not write history plays but plays that mock history" (Marking Time" 202). He further claims that "to misread Friel's plays as history plays, or even as plays about history, is to see Friel as a writer of commitment, an *écrivain engagé*, as some of those who praise his work have done" (205). Instead, "Far from being an engaged writer, Friel is a writer who doubts even the possibility of writing" (205). Leaving aside the question of attacking as easy a target as Ulick O'Connor's "Brian Friel: Crisis and Commitment," O'Toole continues to give good evidence in support of Friel's skepticism; nonetheless, in this history play, as in many of his plays, Friel wants both to question histories and to expropriate them for a different purpose, a private one, but nonetheless a political one as well. In other words "doubting the possibility of writing" is his engagement. Many critics note and detail the fight over the "possibility of writing" anything that truthfully communicates, the fight over facts and fiction, between O'Neill and Lombard.[111] As well, Werner Huber and Jochen Achilles note in particular the similarity between the views of Friel and Lombard in this debate, seeing both manipulating facts to serve their fictions (Huber 170-71; Achilles "'Homesick for Abroad'" 442). Achilles also notes that, like Hugh O'Neill, Friel too is unhappy "with such manipulations" (442). O'Toole calls the play "so reflexive that it ceases to have any dramatic tension or much theatrical force" ("Marking Time" 211) while Christopher Murray suggests that the self-reflexivity of the play makes it almost self-cancelling ("Brian Friel's *Making History*" 76), but, as Huber adds, the self-reflexivity is all that saves Friel from replicating Lombard (171).

In the play, Friel moves from a concern with the making of history, to the making of story, to the making of theatrical stories. Werner Huber, Jochen Achilles, and Ulrich Schneider all note how Friel moves from history to meta-history and even from a "historical drama to a meta-historical drama" (Huber 169; Achilles "'Homesick for Abroad'" 437; Schneider 80), but they all focus on Friel's manipulations of history within the play rather than his manipulations of the form of a history play. Citing the clashing multiple perspectives of *Freedom* as a particular example, F.C. McGrath notes Friel's use of the postmodern ("Language, Myth, and History" 535-6). Friel, once again in *Making History*, like in *Freedom*, does create more than one perspective. Unlike *Freedom*, both sides in *Making History* seem whole rather than fragmented, both have believable and even noble motives as opposed to the fractured, multiple, and untrustworthy discourses of the earlier piece. Elmer Andrews does persuasively align O'Neill's complexity of character with that of the inner three and Lombard with the one-sidedness of the public figures in *Freedom* (*The Art of Brian Friel* 207), but by undermining the truthful nature of both perspectives in the latter as opposed to privileging the truth of one perspective in the former, Friel creates a more fragmented play at the same time that it appears less so.

---

[111] For example, see Huber 169-70 and Maxwell "Northern Ireland's Political Drama" 10-11.

Richard Pine argues that Friel "dispenses with form–indeed with most conventions of the stage–in favour of a new content" ("Brian Friel and Contemporary Irish Drama" 200). Such a reading of the play ignores Friel's deliberate playing with form. Pine believes, as he notes elsewhere, that "Friel has thereby succeeded in answering Stanislavsky's predicament about the closure of plays by, in effect, not beginning them" (*Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 211). But Friel doesn't dispense with form and convention; rather he manipulates them and audience expectations of them. Friel sets up the audience for a play in a Stanislavskian manner with an offer of O'Neill to "an audience hungry for a tragic victim" (*Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 216). Yet Friel also frustrates that form by focussing on the theme to such an extent that it overwhelms the status of the tragic victim. Rather than the character, as Christopher Murray suggests, the "theme serv[es] a tragic purpose" (Murray "Brian Friel's *Making History*" 66). By suggesting fictionality on both sides of the debate, Friel also undermines the tragic nature of a theme of "history versus truth" as Murray sees it (66). Jasper Ridley notes in his review of the play that the characters Hugh and Mabel fulfill the "play['s] needs [for] a hero and heroine" (1397). By shunting Mabel off stage after the first half of the play, Friel subverts the convention he establishes, emphasizing his role in her recreation as well as Lombard's. It is not solely history versus truth: though the play does tend in that direction on the surface, the inner truth is undermined as well.

As both Murray and Huber note ("Brian Friel's *Making History*" 68; 170), Friel also reveals the historical play in this history play with his contrasting of Hugh O'Donnell as he appears on stage to the description of him from an actual history. Friel has Lombard identify and quote Lughaid O'Clery's *The Life of Hugh Roe O'Donnell, Prince of Tirconnell (1586-1602)*: "He was a dove in meekness and gentleness, a lion in strength and force. He was a sweet sounding trumpet" (64-5). "Friel demonstrates, by showing the audience (65) the discrepancy between the historical character of O'Donnell in the play and how he is described by a historian after his death, the process by which a myth is given currency" (Murray, "Brian Friel's *Making History*" 68). One might also say that Friel demonstrates, by telling the audience, the discrepancy between his own stage creation of Hugh O'Donnell and such descriptions of the "historical" O'Donnell. Furthermore, Lombard's mentioning earlier of other very different histories being written of the time by Tadhg O' Cianain and Edmund Spenser (52-3) also draws attention to Friel's treatment of the histories of O'Neill and O'Donnell.

Parallelling the manipulations of the history of Hugh O'Donnell with Lombard's–and Friel's–manipulations of the history of Hugh O'Neill reminds the audience of Friel's use of two Hughs. In the scenes involving both of them, the very use of the name in dialogue creates potential confusion. When they read together Hugh O'Neill's planned submission to Queen Elizabeth, O'Donnell begins by mocking, but in the end their voices meld:

> *At first* O'DONNELL *reads his portions of the submission in mocking and exaggerated tones. He is unaware that* O'NEILL *is deadly serious. But as they proceed through the document –* O'DONNELL *reading his sections,* O'NEILL *speaking his by heart –* O'DONNELL'S *good humour drains away and he ends up as formal and as grave as* O'NEILL." (48-9)

Some accuse Friel of making O'Donnell into a boisterous, pugnacious stage Irishman. Patricia Sharkey in particular castigates Friel at length for creating "as recognizable a Stage Irishman as Captain Macmorris or any since created" (14).[112] Elmer Andrews states, "Hugh O'Donnell is simply a clown" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 207). Even Jasper Ridley, who responds positively to the play in his review, thinks that "Friel is unfair to Hugh O'Donnell...who is portrayed as the type of uncouth Irish clown that the English Tudor dramatists might have imagined him to be" (1397). I think that is precisely the point. The parallelling play with history implies that O'Donnell represents another potential telling of O'Neill, and an all too familiar one. Sharkey states that Macmorris "personified the Elizabethan perception of the "Capital Rebels" Hugh O' Donnell and Hugh O'Neill" (14). Friel clearly contrasts the familiar telling of O'Donnell with his unfamiliar telling of O'Neill.[113] On the first and one of the few very deliberate occasions when O'Neill uses an Irish accent he does so to mock the English expectation of his "revert[ing] completely to type" (3). When O'Donnell enters shortly after, that type arrives on stage. Sharkey also criticizes Friel for requiring Stephen Rea (as O'Neill) to "dispel the audience's collective memory of the Gaelic hero O'Neill by acting effeminately and speaking in an educated English accent" (14). Friel deliberately contrasts O'Neill to O'Donnell, to the expected image of a stage Irishman: either a negative one constructed by the English *or* a positive one constructed by the Irish collective memory. Rea's performative departure from the received image also prepares the audience for other disjunctions in the play. As suggested by Sharkey's criticism, Rea's performance also incorporates the desire in the play, and O'Neill's personal desire at the end, to include the female in the male, creating a kind of androgynous liminal figure.

---

[112] Macmorris of course is Shakespeare's, and arguably the first ever, stage Irishman from *Henry V*. Sharkey begins her review by quoting Macmorris speaking of his desire to stop talking and start fighting, much like O'Donnell and unlike O'Neill in this play.

Rea's use of two accents, following Friel, also implies that the two Hughs may be incorporated, in a sense, in the one figure of Hugh O'Neill, the liminal figure who can function in either world. Robert Welch suggests that "Hugh doesn't have a stable language himself. He speaks with an English accent for most of the play, except in moments of anger, when he breaks into his native Tyrone" (145). Yet the use of dialect seems much more deliberate, much more controlled than that. In the opening stage directions Friel says, "*He [*O'Neill*] always speaks in an upper-class English accent except on those occasions specifically scripted*" (1). Having set up the deliberate importance of each use of the Tyrone accent, Friel goes on to script it only five times in the play. The first mocking occasion referred to above, is hardly uncontrollably angry but rather deliberately cynical and, perhaps, a bit bitter. On the next occasion he is angry, but he is immediately able to control that anger, marking a deliberate contrast in its use. He uses it here to reject public politics, to reject Spain, Rome, and the pressure of his countrymen, in favour of the personal, his relationship with Mabel (14). On the third occasion, O'Neill deliberately uses the device as a private jest between himself and Mabel, intimating the combination of Irish and English that their relationship represents and even the combination of Irish and English that he alone represents (17). This third use makes the fourth more biting when, in private between him and Mabel, he deliberately "reverts to type" in order to insult her and her expectations (41). O'Neill does not use the Ulster accent again until the very end of the play when he privately begs the dead Mabel's forgiveness for losing the word battle with Lombard. Again, this is not anger: O'Neill uses an English accent all through the angry word battle itself. Rather, O'Neill makes a sorrowful connection to his private history even as Lombard's public political history triumphs. Finally, O'Neill lacks the control he has had earlier and speaks in Welch's unstable language, fading from one to the other. Yet, in doing so, O'Neill enforces a private appeal in a private voice. He connects to the Stanislavskian "domestic" first half of the play when the accent was last used. The fade into "*pure Tyrone*" calls attention to the private voice of the play and makes an emotional appeal, like the "mute" voices at the end of *The Freedom of the City*, to the audience to accept the private vision, the inner story, of history which the play gives as truth. At the same time, the performativity of the fade, the reminder of the two Hughs and the two Hughs in one, and of the fictionality in the telling, asks the audience to consider intellectually the deliberate constructions of these accents, these ways of telling, these discourses. One clue to the significance of the use of accents here is their lack in *Translations*. Using accents in that play could help the audience to easily distinguish between the Irish and the English; not using them fosters a creative confusion. Clearly, Friel carefully considers when, and when not to, have the characters speak with accents, particularly when, as in both plays, any sort of national identity or allegiance is at stake.

---

[113] Friel also reminds us of his earlier telling of a Hugh O'Donnell in *Translations* with the name of this character whose territory as Earl of Tyrconnell, as George O'Brien points out (118), would encompass much of present Donegal including the Ballybeg of *Translations*. By doing so, he implies the potential stage Irishness inside that other Hugh as well.

Whereas *Freedom of the City* gives us a legitimate "real" private discourse under the competing false public discourses, *Making History* gives us blank spaces which must be filled, and the contest to fill them with competing discourses, both public and private. The disjunctive gaps in the intermission and between scenes in the second act have prepared us for Friel's particular Stanislavskian filling, his making of a cohesive pattern. We have seen that the large events in history are gaps which we cannot see, and that such gaps lead to a culmination in narrative storytelling, Lombard's storytelling, which fills in the blanks we have just experienced. The contrasting "real story" of Hugh O'Neill causes us to rebel against Lombard's blatant misconstruction at the same time that we can recognize this misconstruction as both necessary and inevitable. The ending is therefore distinctly and deliberately unsatisfactory with some criticising the play for being too revisionist and others for it not being revisionist enough. At the same time that he calls attention to Lombard's manipulations, Friel exposes his own Stanislavskian filling of the gaps to create Hugh's "real" story. The play supplies the missing private history so often erased by official public histories, while it also calls attention to its own construction of this private history.

In one sense, the battle of the play is to include O'Neill's story within history by including Mabel's, her story within his story, within history. The staging of the opening moment of the play signals the importance of introducing the feminine into the masculine: in the "*comfortless*" male room, O'Neill energetically introducing flowers as decoration in order to welcome his new wife within his house (1). To some extent Mabel functions as a symbol of all that has been deliberately erased in O'Neill's life, in Irish public life and in history in general. Even as Hugh fails, the play itself wins this battle. "While Lombard relegates Mabel to a minor role, Friel makes her central" (McKeone, "Fact and Fiction" 8). The play is, as Maxwell puts it, "the story Lombard will not tell" ("'Figures in a Peepshow'" 64). Yet Lombard's version is not entirely dispossessed nor, very deliberately, is O'Neill/Friel's version unquestionably authentic. Mabel's story must be a construction itself if the play's argument is to be accepted. Friel tips his own construction of this private story by citing this one particular revision in his programme note to the play. Of all the possible examples of his revisions (outlined ably by Christopher Murray in his "Brian

Friel's *Making History*" 61-2), he chooses to highlight the fact that "even though Mabel...died in 1591, it suited my story to keep her alive for another ten years." Sean Connolly delineates how Friel's construction of Mabel is actually more complicated and confusing than that: he places Kinsale as happening in 1593 rather than 1601 and the real Mabel died in 1595 not 1591 ("Translating History" 160). Connolly suggests that Friel confuses the issue further in order to "advertise...his liberation from the constraints of the historical record" and/or to create "a subtle practical joke at the expense of the...academic fact checker" (160). Surely he also does so in order to "advertise" that his fiction is precisely that, a fiction. Connolly further notes that Friel in his revisions of the accepted tale follows O'Faolain's account in *The Great O'Neill* closely, but Friel changes dates, Hugh and Mabel's separation, and, most importantly, makes Mabel much more central to the story: again signalling that the playwright constructed his own particular version of her story within (his)story. Friel adds another subtle clue about his constructions by listing the McDevitts of Ballybeg among the vanquished after the Battle of Kinsale (45). Of course, Ballybeg only exists within the world of Friel's plays.

So Friel both includes the private story and undermines it at the same time. Katharine Worth notes that "Friel usually deploys the theatrical illusion so as to convince us that there is a truth however hidden; a 'real' life against which the narratives must be measured" (77). As in *Freedom of the City* we see the "real" life on stage, especially in the first act in the interplay of Hugh and Mabel, before we hear a discourse that covers it with an illusion. We know Hugh's complexities with our senses. "Our sympathies are clearly with the anguished wreck of a man begging for 'truth' rather than the abstracted chronicler who ignores the private life in the interests of creating a desirable public image" (Elmer Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel* 207). Connolly suggests that the play fails specifically because Friel makes this "real" life too obviously true in comparison to Lombard's falsifications and therefore Lombard is too easy a target ("Translating History" 163). But, with his form, Friel calls attention to his own falsifications as well. Since he is making his own pattern and calling attention to that, Lombard is not the target, the telling is. Before the gap provides a disjunction, the first half of the play, "the domestic story" which includes Mabel, is predominantly Stanislavskian, predominantly, to use Lombard's words (or Kiberd's), a coherent pattern. But awareness grows after the gap that, for all the reportage and debate of her, for all her centrality, Mabel never appears in the second act. As George O'Brien says, "In her arguments against her husband's rebellion...Mabel has her finest hour, all to no avail: virtually the next mention of her name is in connection with her death in childbed" (119). Friel consciously commits another dramatic faux pas: both the major public event, the battle, and the major private event, her death, are off stage. Murray notes that one of Friel's changes is to make "Mabel's death in childbirth coincide with the debacle of Kinsale" ("Brian Friel's *Making History*" 73). Both omitting the major event to which the play builds and losing the heroine, Mabel, after only half of the play are, as Katharine Worth notes of the latter, "a sad loss, theatrically" (85). But these "theatrical losses" serve to reinforce the creation in the gaps in the play. The omission of the Battle of Kinsale and the removal of Mabel Bagenal are similar enterprises, omissions which allow others to tell their tales.

On the subject of Mabel, Friel and Lombard are similar storytellers. Friel first deliberately includes Mabel, then he deliberately, as with Lombard, erases her. No matter how inclusive O'Neill or Friel wish to be, no matter who tells the story – whether it is Lombard, O'Neill, or Friel – Mabel, the female, is constructed by a male. Even if O'Neill had won the representational battle, as Friel and the play do, Mabel does not get to define herself, to create her own "gratifying pattern."

Like *Freedom*, this play includes the private story, but the private story is open rather than closed. Jochen Achilles notes that Friel "refus[es] to present a harmonizing solution" at the end of the play. He believes that this open structure fulfills the Field Day aim of creating a new sensitivity in the audience about history and identity formation rather than providing a "different set of opinions" ("'Homesick for Abroad'" 442). In his programme note to the play, Declan Kiberd also cites this lack of finality as one of *Making History's* particular strengths. On the other hand, Richard Pine suggests that Friel's mixing of public and private succeeds in *Freedom of the City* but is flawed in *Making History* ("Yeats, Friel" 158), but Friel's problem play is deliberate, a made problem. Kiberd notes in the programme that Friel is making a "search for a usable past" by offering a choice of historical dreams and suggesting the choice of an enabling one while acknowledging it as fictional. With the Stanislavskian weight given to the "real" private story, Friel proposes a preference for an inclusive history as a more empowering pattern for the present time. Friel asserts the importance of making a pattern and suggests that it is time for this particular inclusive pattern at the same time that he exposes it as a made pattern. Put another way, Friel creates an open structure that allows for national claims to authentic identities while at the same time exposing their ultimately fictional nature. Katharine Worth cites just such a response, that of a commentator on the play who hoped "that the symbolism of the happy marriage between O'Neill and Mabel, with her English yeoman virtues, would prompt beneficent new thought about what the Protestant community in the North could bring to Ireland" (85).

I might add that the happy marriage of Brechtian distancing within Stanislavskian identification might bring new thought about what Friel's form in *Making History* offers to ways to create, without foreclosing, new thoughts on current debates. Choosing to use a predominantly Stanislavskian form in *Making History* rather than the predominantly Brechtian one used in *Freedom of the City* makes Friel's questioning of the truth of public discourses all the more disquieting. He questions the veracity of representations of reality in a form which has been traditionally used to depict nature truthfully. Elmer Andrews criticizes the play for working "in a somewhat self-conscious way, its effects appearing rather deliberately organised, even somewhat contrived" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 207), but such contrivance is what makes the play work. Friel embraces uncertainties in discourse and form in order to say something cohesive, to claim the importance of a knowingly false authenticity.

In an attempt to heal the body politic, Friel adopts a predominantly Stanislavskian form to connect emotionally with the audience before undermining this form with Brechtian alienation in order to connect intellectually. His dual approach can appeal both privately and publicly to his audience, a goal he most devoutly wishes:

> A private wisdom is being proclaimed from the rooftops. There is no

> contradiction in this. It is a contrived miracle – well, a trick of the trade. Because the public utterance must still retain that private intimacy where it has its origins. And even though the audience hears what it calls speeches, it hears too the author's private voice, that intimate language, that personal utterance. And that composite, that duet – the private and intimate set free into public canticle where both voices are distinctly audible – that is what makes the experience of theatre unique. And every time that happens the theatre fulfills itself again. (Friel, "Seven Notes for a Festival Programme" 173-4)

Though with these words Friel maintains a questioning of his "miracles," of himself, he nevertheless expresses his desire to connect to the audience. Werner Huber notes that

> without becoming overtly political this play works towards a heightened awareness of history and myth. When Hugh O'Neill in the play speaks of trying 'to open [his] people to the strange new ways of Europe, to ease them into a new assessment of things, to nudge them towards changing evaluations and beliefs' (p. 40), his words acquire a more than ominous significance. He is suddenly reaching out through the fourth wall and his words could be taken quite literally by any audience on both sides of the Irish Sea – any night. (172)

The privileging of the inner three in *The Freedom of the City* led to a more traditional catharsis tending to emotionally purge the audience. Friel's "catharsis" in *Making History* lies not so much in a purging of emotions as in a purging of fixed beliefs: "The cathartic effect of Friel's plays lies in the audience's realization that the loss of fixed principles is not tantamount to nihilism" (Achilles, "Homesick for Abroad" 443). Achilles and Murray both cite the same passage in Brian Brennan's review of the original production (Derry, 20 September 1988) to explain the relationship of the play to the audience:

> Friel has presented us with a sort of dramatic Uncertainty Principal [sic] – the very act of observing and recording will alter the nature of the event or character so that the 'reality' is lost forever.

> By embracing the belief that an 'historical text is a kind of literary artifact,' Friel is repeating, indeed celebrating the very process which poor old Hugh O'Neill deplores within the play. And this lovely existential joke will be repeated with every performance of the play.
>
> In the weeks ahead, *Making History* will go to 21 towns and cities. Each person who sees it will, because of the nature of the theatre, observe a different Hugh O'Neill begging to be portrayed as he *was*. And so, each member of each audience will be a party to the re-invention of Hugh O'Neill. (qtd. in Murray, "Brian Friel's *Making History*" 77: n.19; qtd. in Achilles 442-3)

Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt argues that despite taking part in "'making history'...it is inevitable that every viewer will take away from *Making History* a particular impression of an historical figure and the events that surrounded him" (28). In other words, the experience of seeing the play will substitute Friel's "own history" for history: Friel "contributes his own narrative to the fray" while trying to break open history as narrative" (28). She fails to take into account the formal undermining of Friel's made history, which he hints at in the program and realizes in the play. I would qualify Brennan's comments to add that, and this is O'Neill's victory in the play, Friel makes the audience aware that they are "party to the re-invention of Hugh O'Neill," that they are "contributing their own narratives to the fray," and that the fray exists at all.

Ironically, as much of the critical commentary suggests, the more Stanislavskian *Making History* does not have as strong an emotional impact on audiences as the more Brechtian *Freedom of the City*. Appropriately enough, however, given the Brechtian core of the latter and Stanislavskian core of the former, and as David Nowlan's recent review of *Making History* suggests, perhaps it ultimately has a greater intellectual impact: The play "sent us out...not exactly singing with joy for the truths of history, but thinking seriously about how some of that history came to be written" (n.pag.).

CHAPTER FIVE:"IMAGES OF THE PAST EMBODIED IN LANGUAGE" OR FOSSILISED SODA BREAD?

TRANSLATIONS AND *THE COMMUNICATION CORD*

> HUGH. I look at James and three thoughts occur to me: A—that it is not the literal past, the 'facts' of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language. James has ceased to make that discrimination. ... . B—we must never cease renewing those images; because once we do, we fossilise. Is there no soda bread? (*Translations* 66 – 1980)

> TIM. This is where we all come from.
> DONOVAN. Indeed.
> TIM. This is our first cathedral.
> DONOVAN. Amen to that.
> TIM. This shaped all our souls. This determined our first pieties. This is a friend of mine. (*The Communication Cord* 34 – 1982)

Widely acknowledged as a masterpiece since the moment of its first production, *Translations* is a play of pivotal importance to both Friel and Field Day. As many commentators have observed at length, the play is an intersection of Friel's concerns with identity, history, myth, and, particularly, language. After the production of this play, critics began to see translation as a trope for Friel's concerns with communication in this play, his entire body of work, and for Field Day's concerns with the postcolonial.[114] Others have noted how his use of staging devices, using an indistinguishable English for both Irish and English and having the most communicative scene in the play be between two lovers who don't speak the same language, has most concisely expressed his views on the lack of communication in linguistic exchanges and the potential for communication non-verbally beyond the words.[115]

---

[114] See Worthen, "Homeless Words: Field Day and the Politics of Translation"; Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*; Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama*; Elmer Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel*; Lojek, "Brian Friel's Plays and George Steiner's Linguistics: Translating the Irish;" and McGrath, *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama*.

Yet he immediately and deliberately repudiated some of his success with his next original play for the company, *The Communication Cord.* Using a form which seemingly contrasts that of the former play, he set out to revise his, and his company's, history. Fellow Field Day board member Seamus Deane goes so far as to call *The Communication Cord* "an antidote to *Translations*, a farce which undermines the pieties sponsored by the earlier play" ("Introduction" 21). Yet more than providing an antidote to the earlier play, *The Communication Cord* makes explicit the undercutting comic implications of farce inherent in it as well: *Translations* also undermines pieties even while it presents them. The passages above, for example, illustrate Friel's similar use of deflationary "punch lines" to puncture pretension in both plays.

In an interview with *Radio Telefís Éireann*, Stephen Rea, Friel's founding partner in Field Day and the actor who played Owen and Tim in the first productions of *Translations* and *The Communication Cord* respectively, suggested that the two plays were completely different: "Having seen *Translations*, you *couldn't* have predicted *Communication Cord*, you know, a farce and all that kind of territory that he's dealing in" ("Brian Friel and Field Day" 179). But, in retrospect, the farce of the latter play is prefigured in the comic moments of the former. Friel himself insists on a comparison of the two plays, saying, "I want it [*The Communication Cord*] to be seen in tandem with *Translations*"(qtd. in O'Toole, "Man From God Knows Where" 23). In the same interview, he acknowledges that the later play is an antidote to the earlier one, and especially to *Translations* being "offered pieties I didn't intend for it" (21). Yet what does such a comparison imply, how does Friel undermine these pieties, how should the antidote be taken?

---

[115] For a more detailed look at language as staging device, and other non-verbal staging devices, particularly see Roche, "A Bit off the Map: Brian Friel's *Translations* and Shakespeare's *Henry IV*" or *Contemporary Irish Drama*; also see Arkins, "The role of Greek and Latin in Friel's *Translations*"; Etherton, *Contemporary Irish Dramatists*; Worthen, "Homeless Words: Field Day and the Politics of Translation"; and Burke, "'As If Language No Longer Existed': Non-verbal Theatricality in the Plays of Brian Friel."

Following Friel's intent, some critics have compared the two plays, yet most still focus extensively or exclusively on *Translations*–in fact more than on any other Friel play–while writing very little on *The Communication Cord*. Indeed, so many have written on *Translations* that I intend to focus my discussion primarily on this one point concerning an undercutting of the pieties when the plays are "seen in tandem," rather than specifically on the overt linguistic, historical, and mythological concerns.[116] Critics have tended to either ignore the latter play or focus on how it deepens by contrast a mythologising tendency, the one which creates pieties, in the former. Kearney, in one of the few in-depth comparisons of the plays, and one of the few articles to deal with *The Communication Cord* in any depth at all, still says, "If *Translations* tended to mythologize language, *The Communication Cord* demythologizes it" ("Language Play" 52). While framing the comparison to point out the undermining of pieties in the latter, he underlines the creation of those pieties in the former. On the cover of the Gallery Press edition of *The Communication Cord*, David Nowlan expresses this typical view: "the new farce is virtually a send-up of the sentiments so movingly expressed in *Translations*."[117] Even on the cover of the text, Nowlan and the publisher promote a view of the play as a send-up of the heartfelt pieties in *Translations*, ironically strengthening them by contrast. Dantanus certainly believes in that strengthening: "It is possible that in...*The Communication Cord*,

---

[116] As Ulf Dantanus notes *Translations*' "great strength is that it approaches politics through history, anthropology and linguistics" (*A Study* 199). Of course it does so through its staging. For a detailed list of sources interrelating Friel's uses of myth, history, identity, and language, and staging, and for those dealing with these points individually, see the Appendix on *Translations*.

[117] Critics who echo these sentiments include the following: Barry in Barry, Friel, Andrews 118, Welch 145; James P. and Mark C. Farrelly 106; Binnie 367; Zach "Brian Friel's *Translations*" 80; and Worthen 32. Many reviewers also make this comparison: O'Toole, "Barriers" 52; Jeffery 1130; and, from "Field Day: *The Communication Cord*,"a collective review of the play in *Theatre Ireland*, Dawe 67; Roades 67-8; Porter 68; Fitzgibbon 68. McGrath surveys some of the key comparisons in his *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 200-201, but he too tends to ennoble the former by contrast on 198.

Friel was attempting to shift some of the sediments left by *Translations*. But the play is too slight to do this–it succeeds instead in confirming the importance of the earlier play" (*A Study* 206). Other critics note that Friel uses *The Communication Cord* to warn readers and viewers about taking the pieties of *Translations* too seriously. Following Friel, Ginette Verstraete claims that *The Communication Cord* "has to be read 'in tandem' with *Translations*, in that it was written as a counterweight to the critics' solemn treatment of the previous work" (95), but that doesn't stop her from doing exactly that earlier in the same article and even on the same page (92-5). Marilynn J. Richtarik also sees the latter play as corrective (129). Nonetheless, she makes a more detailed but still typical comparison of the two, stating that the latter play also deals with themes of "naming and the difficulty of communication–in a farcical way" (131). This comparison, like Nowlan's and Richard Pine's,[118] serves to strengthen the seriousness of the earlier piece. In all of these cases, the undermining of pieties in the latter play seems to lead back into yet more serious considerations of the former. Edna Longley certainly claims that *The Communication Cord*...comfortably fails in its intention to subvert the pieties of *Translations*" (*Poetry in the Wars* 191). In contrast, Michael Etherton suggests reviewing our response to those pieties inside *Translations* itself: "*The Communication Cord* warns us against any unreflecting emotional catharsis we might read into *Translations* in the undeniably intense experience of it in performance" (199). And Eric Binnie states that the latter play "acts as a humorous corrective to any superficial intention wrongly created by the elegiac mood of the earlier play" (367). W.B. Worthen also supports this binary before suggesting a different potential reading:

> The nostalgic cultural nationalism of *Translations*–which Friel sharply qualifies in the companion play *The Communication Cord*–relies in part on Steiner's vision of "translation" in which the authority of the past, the

---

[118] Richard Pine also claims, "*The Communication Cord* was written to deflate the cathedral to cultural pieties which the success and recognition of *Translations* had created" (Pine "Yeats, Friel" 158). But then, elsewhere, he suggests that "*The Communication Cord* is the mirror image of *Translations*, the key to the author's serious intentions" (Pine *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 179).

> "classic," the origin becomes the master trope of the present. But Friel's performance of the past in *Translations* suggests an alternative reading of the politics of translation, in which performance can expose or interrogate rather than merely reproduce classical authority. (32)

I would add that Friel's emphasis on performativity in the text, his performative undermining of nostalgic cultural nationalism in the piece, points the audience to Worthen's latter reading. Seeing the plays in tandem should involve not just recognizing a send-up of the former play in the latter play, but a reconsideration of a send-up in the former play as well. *Translations* does internally what *The Communication Cord* makes external; it too has a counter-mythologising tendency.

Translating the (Stage Irish) Past

Friel's search for a main character in *Translations* reveals both his sincere and subversive impulses. In his reply to J.H. Andrews' criticisms about the play's historical accuracy, Friel outlines his struggle in writing the play and, in particular, on settling on a main character (Barry, Friel, Andrews 122-23). Here Friel states his desire to write a "profound" play "about Daniel O'Connell and Catholic Emancipation; a play about colonialism; and the one constant–a play about the death of the Irish language and the acquisition of English and the profound effects that that change-over would have on a people" (122). Yet he also finds himself unable to write a play with O'Connell or either Colonel Colby, who becomes Lancey, or John O'Donovan, who becomes Owen, as a main character (123). Instead, Friel settles on Hugh O'Donnell. F.C. McGrath states that "Friel's preoccupations with language fused with a serendipitous discovery about an ancestor who was a hedge-school master and about the ordnance survey that created the Anglicized map of Ireland as we know it today" ("Brian Friel and the Politics" 246). But McGrath leaves out what Friel underscores twice in his reply to Andrews: this ancestor liked to drink. First, Friel says, "I learned that a great-great-grandfather of mine...had been a hedge-schoolmaster...and it was whispered in the family that he was fond of a drop" (123). Later, after discussing his attempts to write the play with other main characters, Friel notes, "Finally and sensibly I abandoned the idea of trying to dramatize *A Paper Landscape* and embarked on a play about a drunken hedge-schoolmaster" (123). So, in a forum where he is defending his play from accusations of historical inaccuracy in particular, and also from the charge of excessive pieties that critics felt such "inaccuracies" had led to, Friel both underlines his serious intent and then undermines it by insisting on the play being, first and foremost, the story of a drunk.[119] Complicating this telling further, Hogan criticizes Friel because "the most arresting character, the hedge schoolmaster, is not the main character and has little to do with the plot" (131). This may be precisely Friel's point. By both asserting and undermining Hugh's centrality, Friel makes another of his deliberate flaws, one that further allows him to ennoble and undercut Hugh, and his words in the play, by making him attractive as well as ineffective.

The play itself makes explicit Friel's concern in portraying this "main character." From his first entrance, Hugh bursts on the scene always drinking and speaking grandly in Greek, Latin, Gaelic, and even English, when necessary. He displays in abundance two of the primary characteristics of the stage Irishman: drunkenness and eloquence. Even before he enters, Sarah, in an extended bit of stage business, mimes his drinking to tell Manus where Hugh has gone (14); Manus tells Maire about Biddy Hanna's letter describing Hugh as "the aul drunken schoolmaster" (16); Doalty and Bridget enter with Doalty imitating a drunken Hugh and Bridget explaining that they have just seen him "as full as a pig" and that Hugh has "been on the batter since this morning" (17); and finally, immediately before Hugh enters, Doalty proclaims, "The bugger's not coming at all. Sure the bugger's hardly fit to walk" (23). Hugh will of course immediately contradict Doalty by entering, presenting a contrast to the image so far constructed by the other characters, one which Friel outlines in his stage directions:

> HUGH *enters. A large man, with residual dignity, shabbily dressed, carrying a stick. He has, as always, a large quantity of drink taken, but he*

---

[119] See the appendix on *Translations* for critics who engage with Friel's historical revisionings.

> *is by no means drunk.* (23)

In these directions, Friel makes explicit a balance in this character who though shabbily dressed has residual dignity, who though drinking heavily is not drunk. Friel positions Hugh as an ambiguous character, both able to make, as he does, insightful statements about the state of Ireland and its language and open to the discrediting of those statements because of his character, or lack of it.

Once he is on stage, for the rest of the first act, we see Hugh constantly associated with drinking. He either mentions drinking, drinks repeatedly, or others mention it in connection with him (23, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31). Finally, near the end of the act "HUGH *is now drunk. He holds onto the edge of the table*" (32). Trying to climb up the stairs at the very end, he has difficulty "*negotiating the steps*" (33). The dominant impression created by this act must be that of a drunken, and therefore, probably unreliable character. His difficulty negotiating the stairs suggests a difficulty negotiating other areas as well. This image here links with the final image of the play of Hugh climbing these stairs to deliver his, and the play's, final speech. Whatever potential lyricism the final moment embodies must be weighed against the inherent ineptitude prefigured here.

Despite such a strong indication of ambiguous authority, many critics take Hugh's statements, especially his statements on language, at face value.[120] Richard Kearney goes so far as to describe Hugh in the most surprising of terms as making "sober acknowledgement" of the inability to change the past and "soberly challeng[ing]" the community to adapt history and language to the present and future" ("Language Play" 42). Stephen Regan gives a typical view of Hugh and his pronouncements:

> It is Hugh who observes with devastating insight that Irish eloquence and

---

[120] Indeed, most critics consider this play to deal very seriously with language. I am not suggesting that Friel does not consider the question of language on a serious and fundamental level in the play. Indeed, the decision to use the formal device of English representing two different languages forces a close examination of linguistic power. But I also believe Friel is careful to undercut any sweeping generalizations about language through an undercutting of the primary proponent of these ideas in the play: Hugh. See the appendix on *Translations* for serious discussions of language in the play.

vivacity have an inverse relationship with conditions of desperation and defeat. The Irish language, he notes is:

> . . . a rich language . . . full of the mythologies of fantasy and hope and self-deception – a syntax opulent with tomorrows. It is our response to mud cabins and a diet of potatoes; our only method of replying to . . . inevitabilities. (38)

What Regan fails to consider is that Friel, through Hugh, delivers this insight with exactly the sort of eloquence that he is exposing.[121] Since at least as early as *Philadelphia* Friel has linked eloquence, particularly Irish eloquence, to failure as indeed he does through Hugh in this passage, ironically suggesting that, expressed in language, this insight too is a failure at some level.

McGrath in particular asserts that "the most articulate character in the play on the subject of language is Hugh, the erudite hedge-schoolmaster" ("Brian Friel and the Politics" 246), without using Friel's stage Irish characterization of Hugh to balance this insight. Elsewhere, after establishing Friel's use of Steiner's theories of communication in the play, including direct quotations as well as paraphrases spoken by Hugh (such as the one above–see "Irish Babel" 37), McGrath repeatedly refers to Hugh as "Friel's most articulate spokesman for Steiner's insights" ("Brian Friel and Lying" 8; "Irish Babel" 37, 43).[122] McGrath, who notably left out Hugh's quality of drunkenness when mentioning

---

[121] For others who take Hugh's pronouncements at face value see Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 176-77; Verstraete 94; Etherton 204; Zach, "Brian Friel's *Translations*" 81, 85; Shaun Richards, "The Changing Landscape of Fact" 94; Silverstein 139, Richtarik 33; Meissner 170-171, 172-3; and Maxwell, "Figures in a Peepshow" 62-3. Some critics do take Hugh's drinking into account, but only to suggest that Hugh's eloquence transcends his inebriation (Lee 173-4, 178-9; Peacock, "Translating the Past" 132-3) or that his inebriation only makes him a more appropriate flawed messenger/hero (Duncan 3). O'Gorman notes Hugh's tendency to drink and Friel's deliberate allying of him with the tradition of the stage Irishman, but still never questions Hugh's statements on language (1-7).

[122] Velten concurs with McGrath's characterization of Friel's use of Steiner through Hugh (238-9). For others who examine Friel's use of Steiner see Kearney,

Friel's discovery of a hedge-schoolmaster ancestor, and other commentators omit Friel's qualifying of all eloquence and his further qualifying of Hugh's particular eloquence with drunkenness: they don't properly consider the source.

In Act Two, Hugh delivers many of Steiner's insights which are quoted by almost all critics who write about the play:

> You'll find, sir, that certain cultures expend on their vocabularies and syntax acquisitive energies and ostentations entirely lacking in their material lives. I suppose you could call us a spiritual people. (42)
>
> Yes, it is a rich language, Lieutenant, full of the mythologies of fantasy and hope and self-deception – a syntax opulent with tomorrows. It is our response to mud cabins and a diet of potatoes; our only method of replying to . . . inevitabilities. (42)
>
> Remember that words are signals, counters. They are not immortal. And it can happen . . . that a civilisation can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of . . . fact. (43)

But, like McGrath, most critics fail to consider Hugh's inebriation in the scene. Before he enters Manus has told Owen to "hide the bottle" for fear Hugh will see it (36), an expression repeated and emphasized in Owen's translation for Yolland (37). We also find out at this point that Hugh (probably drunk) fell on Manus when Manus was a baby, thereby causing Manus' lameness (37). When Hugh enters, his first action is to drink, grimace, and get a refill (41). He pours himself another drink shortly after, between his linguistic pronouncements (42). As he does, he tells Yolland that Anna na mBreag's name,

---

"Language Play: Brian Friel and Ireland's Verbal Theatre,"and especially his appendix of important passages from Steiner, Lojek, "Brian Friel's Plays and George Steiner's Linguistics: Translating the Irish"; and Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama*. Lojek does note, parenthetically, that Hugh's drinking undermines his authority, but fails to explore the implications of that undercutting. Instead, she carries on with her assessment of Friel and Steiner unmodified (84-86).

whose poteen they are drinking, translates as Anna of the Lies (41). Hugh himself suggests therefore that those under the influence of it are lying, and no one in the play is more under that influence than he. McGrath even asserts Friel's use of the powers and possibilities of lying following Steiner's theory that speech is meant to conceal rather than reveal ("Irish Babel 35ff."; "The Irish Art of Lying"), yet he fails to consider that by placing Steiner's words in Hugh's mouth Friel enacts a Cretan liar's paradox. Hugh must be lying about the lying. Similarly, Hugh suffers from an eloquence paradox, eloquently exposing the failure of eloquence in his speeches in this scene. Hugh further undercuts his eloquence with action. After the second pronouncement (cited above), he immediately tries to borrow money from Owen, presumably to buy something to drink, but almost all critics leave out this part of the speech. Those critics who do include it tend to ignore it anyway. Yet this juxtaposition is surely deflating to the grand eloquence that precedes it. A fuller passage reads as follows:

> Yes, it is a rich language, Lieutenant, full of the mythologies of fantasy and hope and self-deception – a syntax opulent with tomorrows. It is our response to mud cabins and a diet of potatoes; our only method of replying to inevitabilities. (*To* OWEN) Can you give me the loan of half a crown? (42)

The epigraph which began this chapter is another such instance of context undermining eloquence.

> HUGH. I look at James and three thoughts occur to me: A—that it is not the literal past, the 'facts' of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language. James has ceased to make that discrimination. . . . B—we must never cease renewing those images; because once we do, we fossilise. [C] Is there no soda bread? (66)

This later passage highlights yet another failing of Hugh's–his failure to finish his thoughts–which he has also committed in the scene in Act Two and which Owen points out immediately after he leaves that scene: "'An *expeditio* with three purposes': the children laugh at him: he always promises three points but he never gets beyond A and B"

(43). Point C in these cases seems to be drinking or eating, reducing intellectual eloquence to bodily function.

On the other hand, Friel clearly intends that Hugh be taken seriously as well. The playwright has often advocated making English distinctively Irish, seeing that as one of the primary goals of Field Day. In two different interviews he quotes one of Hugh's lines as being the point of the play:

> There's a line where the hedge-school teacher says that they'll have to learn these names and they'll have to make them their new home. And in some way that's what the play is about: having to use a language that isn't our own. (qtd. in Carty 16)

> If I can quote from the play, 'We must learn where we live. We must make them [those new names] our own. We must make them our new home.' That is, we must make these English language words distinctive and unique to us. (qtd. in Agnew 60)

Hugh must be a spokesperson for Friel, but Friel's staging of Hugh also qualifies this speaking. Ulf Dantanus and George O'Brien note the ambiguous balance in Hugh's speeches between pompousness and articulateness (Dantanus, *A Study* 189, 193-4; O'Brien 107-8). Is Hugh a wielder of language or wielded by it? Or both? Kiberd tries to separate the pompous from the articulate, suggesting that the realistic pragmatism of the passage Friel quotes was inherent in the play all along (*Inventing Ireland* 622-3). Kiberd argues that when making earlier pronouncements (*Translations* 42-3) Hugh was, as the stage directions indicate, "deliberately parodying himself" (40). He thus locates Hugh as spokesperson only with this later speech about making English our own, which directly advocates adaptation of English and, potentially, subversion through adaptation. Otherwise he sees Hugh's speeches exhibiting, as Friel has repeatedly in his work, the failure and the material cost of eloquence. Yet Kiberd fails to recognize that Friel undermines Hugh immediately after he makes this adaptive claim. Hugh's next speech is the one quoted at the beginning of this chapter, and repeated above, which begins with eloquence and ends with soda bread. In this later scene, Hugh once again paraphrases or quotes Steiner verbatim as he does in the scene where he "deliberately parodies himself"; he does so in his never completed A, B, (C) format; and his implied concluding C is the deflating request for soda bread (though in a way that material request underlines Kiberd's point regarding eloquence and material cost at the same time as it undermines it – language is a poor substitute for food). Furthermore, while in the earlier scene Hugh spoke in English for Yolland's benefit and could be seen to be clowning for the foolish English Hibernophile, now this eloquence is (presumably) in Irish, linking the failures of eloquence in both languages and both scenes.

Through Hugh's qualities of eloquence and drunkenness, Friel explicitly links him to the long tradition of the stage Irishman. Quoting Gerard O'Brian, Colin Meissner outlines the connection between drunkenness and eloquence in representations of the Irish by the English: "The Irish language question has been at the centre of the Irish/English conflict from the start. In the English version, spoken Irish was associated with "drunkenness, idleness and improvidence" (165). Some critics do see Hugh as a representative from this tradition

> Hugh is emblematic of his nation: eloquent and unsteady on his feet, he is a reminder (or a precursor) of the drunken stage Irishman. (Wiley 57)

> *Translations*...seem[s] to prominently feature the figure of the lovably drunken and eccentric Stage-Irishman....Hugh and Jimmy Jack Cassie bluster and strut and grow progressively drunker. (Gleitman 235)[123]

Elmer Andrews notes that the effect of these characteristics is to undermine Hugh's words: "his authority on any subject is compromised by his comic pedantry which Friel exploits delightfully and by the fact that for most of the play he is under the influence of the liquor he has consumed in Anna na mBreag's – in the house of 'lies'" (177).[124] Reviewers, rather than most critics, certainly record Hugh's drinking and overblown language. For example, four reviewers of four different productions all point this out. Ian Hills, reviewing Field Day's original production at the Guildhall in Derry in 1980, describes Hugh as a "cynical and drunken Latin-quoting schoolmaster" (11). Keith Garebian, reviewing a 1982 production at the Stratford Festival, Canada, describes Hugh as "a perpetually liquor-sodden, shabby scholar of Latin and Greek" (103). In his review of the 1995 New York production of the play at the Plymouth Theatre, Vincent Canby calls Hugh "a windy old schoolmaster who speaks Greek, Latin and English as well as Irish" ("Linking Language" B1). Finally, in her review of a 1993 production at the Donmar Warehouse in London, Patricia Craig says, "The master of the school, Hugh O'Donnell...is drunken and orotund, like something out of William Carelton's *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*" (19). These reviews infer the importance of a more literal reading of Friel's request: it is very important to literally "see" these plays in tandem in order to note the similarity of the performative undercutting in both.

---

[123] See O'Gorman for a more lengthy consideration of Hugh's connection to the tradition of Stage Irishmen (1-7).

Friel himself also links the play with the Irish theatrical tradition. "It's deliberately very traditional, with three acts and a rural setting" (qtd. in Gillespie 6). Since *Translations* was the first production of a company consciously modelled on the Abbey Theatre (at least in goals if not format and function) it was especially appropriate to begin with both an embrace and a questioning of that tradition from within. By doing so, Friel could give the pleasure and hope of the eloquent performativity while linking it to a qualifying cynicism. "The dilemma is that of the modern Anglo-Irish playwright doubting his nation's love of 'fine words' in a dramatic style that continues the Abbey-tradition" (Verstraete 86). By working from within the stage Irish tradition he is able to explode that tradition while still claiming some of its force.

The ending of the play makes explicit the linking to the Abbey and stage Irish traditions. Hugh's last entrance along with his sidekick Jimmy Jack recalls strongly the Paycock's last entrance with Joxer Daly in *Juno and the Paycock*. They enter drunkenly having missed and indeed avoided the calamitous action to find an empty disordered stage.[125] A linking to O'Casey connects Friel to both the Abbey tradition and the older stage Irish tradition of, in particular, Dion Boucicault whom O'Casey acknowledges as an influence. Further, Hugh and Jimmy have been, in the stage Irish and Abbey traditions, tramps in appearance since the beginning of the play, and Hugh is about to tell a tale of their wandering (67). In the middle of his final potentially haunting and elegiac speech, reciting from the *Aeneid* about Carthage and Rome, seen by many as an allegory for Ireland and England, Hugh stumbles and says in a glaring stage Irish, "What the hell's wrong with me? *Sure I know it backways* (my emphasis)" (68). Given his position on the stairs, having just climbed them, this stumbling caesura in the middle of the speech verbally recalls Hugh's difficulty negotiating the steps at the end of the first act. "We observe how *ascent* of the rickety stairs can lead nowhere (it is the location for Hugh's final, amnesiac speech, '*Urbs antiqua fuit*')" (Burke, "As If Language No Longer Existed" 14). O'Gorman suggests that the Irish tradition is a burden to Friel, allowing "Hugh's early comments about the inherently rich Irish tongue [to be] too easily converted to Nationalist purposes" (7). Although the play certainly has been read in this way, Friel makes use of the complementary tradition of the stage Irishman to undercut such a reading. He then writes a complementary play to point this out. Yet, at the same time, as many commentators have noted, Hugh's final speech has an elegiac tone.[126] Once again Friel creates a balance with the stage Irish infiltrating the elegiac and the elegiac next to the parodic.

---

[124] However, as Shaun Richards observes, even though Andrews has "acknowledged that Hugh is subject to Friel's 'subversive irony,' [Andrews] still argues that he [Hugh] 'would seem to have Friel's endorsement if we are to go by [his] symbolic elevation at the end when he ascends the stairs when he speaks'"("Placed Identities" 56).

What therefore is being undermined and what upheld–Hugh as representative of the nostalgic impulse or of the adaptive impulse in the play? I suggest that both are asserted and both are undermined by the other. Friel can thus achieve the productive uncertainty which he constantly strives for in his plays, and even in his interviews. Certainly his goal is to write a play to "capture the peculiar spiritual and indeed material flux that this country is in at the moment" ("The Future of Irish Drama" 14). Without the balance of the undermining of eloquence, the play can become the one-sided "threnody on the death of the Irish language" which Friel says he doesn't want to write. ("Extracts *Translations*" 29 May, 1979, 58). "The interplay between regret and irony in *Translations*, between its lament for a lost culture and its critique of that culture's malaise, allows the play to transcend simple nationalist sentiment in order to dissect a complex national condition" (Gleitman 236). Speaking about the Field Day project Friel says,

---

[125] Elmer Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel* 179-80, Peacock 129-30, Schrank 73 and Heaney 238 have all noted this comparison, a comparison strengthened by Hugh's final speech from the *Aeneid* being about the goddess Juno (68). For a more detailed comparison of Friel and O'Casey, see Christopher Murray's "Friel and O'Casey Juxtaposed."

[126] See for example Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 177; Roche, *Contemporary* 255.

> I think it should lead to a cultural state, not a political state. And I think out of that cultural state, a possibility of a political state follows....It's very grandiose this, and I want to make notice of abdication quickly, but I think they are serious issues and big issues, and they are issues that exercise us all, the six of us [Field Day directors], very much. But you've got to be careful to retain some strong element of cynicism about the whole thing. (qtd. in O'Toole "Man From God Knows Where" 23)

Immediately after making this point, Friel insists on the "seeing in tandem" of his first two original plays for Field Day (and the first and third productions of the company), *Translations* and *The Communication Cord*, suggesting that they represent both the grandiose claims and quick abdication. While most critics who deal with both plays see the latter as a corrective to the excesses of the former, the undermining within *Translations* signals a more immediate abdication. "By foregrounding the performative limits of Irish English, *Translations* at once expresses nostalgia for the sense of identity authorized by the collocation of language and cultural origin, and foregrounds the rhetorical work that this sense of language performs in forming the myth of nations" (Worthen 35). Friel can satisfy both a claim for origins and a skepticism of authenticity. He can have his cake and doubt its existence too.

The Tie That Binds and Unwinds

Yet many missed the parody within *Translations* or found that the core of the play transcended it too easily. Colm Kelly, for example, accepts that "there is in fact an element of parody throughout *Translations*. It must be insisted, however, that the parody leaves intact that which it parodies, the desire for a 'happy conjugation' of word and thing, person and place; or in the words of Hugh...the desire for home" (456). Despite recognizing that the "play criticizes [Hugh's] pandering to colonialist expectations about the drunken, verbalising Irishman" (*Living Stream* 155), Edna Longley maintains that "*Translations* can be read as an 'image of possibility' to redeem the more recent past in the North: an aisling" (159). Friel felt, therefore, compelled to write *The Communication Cord* to signal his more productive abdication of that sentiment at the same time as his embracing of that idea. Wanting to emphasize a reading (and seeing) of the dualities of Hugh, language and homecoming, and identity for those who missed Hugh entering "deliberately parodying himself" (40), Friel deliberately parodies his own work in *The Communication Cord*. As James Simmons says of Friel's rebuttal play, "There is something heroic and liberating about an author pissing on his own monument" (qtd. in Richtarik 134).

Friel begins his rebuttal from the first stage direction of the play which describes the set.

> *The action takes place in a 'traditional' Irish cottage. . . . On the wall left there are three wooden posts complete with chains where cows were chained during milking. (A hundred years ago this was the area of the house where animals were bedded at night.) A wooden stairway, beginning downstage left, leads up to the loft. This loft (unseen) is immediately above the kitchen. A substantial beam of wood at right angles to the kitchen floor supports the floor of this loft. . . .Every detail of the kitchen and its furnishings is accurate of its time. But one quickly senses something false*

> *about the place. It is too pat, too 'authentic.' It is in fact a restored house, a reproduction.* (11)

Before anyone speaks, before the actors even enter, Friel confronts the audience with this deliberate parody. Just before the actors enter, the sound of Jack's motorcycle, makes the parody clear as the seemingly anachronistic modern sound reveals that the play won't be a traditional peasant one at all. Pine (*Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 180), Kearney ("Friel and the Politics of Language Play" 511-12), McGrath (*Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama* 199), and Etherton (205-6) all stress this important initial comparison. According to Pine, "The parody of *Translations* begins with the opening stage directions, indicating that the barn of the hedge school has been refurbished as a country cottage." And Kearney suggests, "The scene of the action in *The Communication Cord* is simply an inverted replica of the condemned school house in...*Translations*." What this comparison reveals is that not only is the set a "too pat" reproduction of the period of the play, but a "too pat" reproduction of a set of a play set in that period – and in the Abbey peasant style – like *Translations*. Friel's earlier play and earlier plays in the peasant style must have also contained a falseness in their seeming authenticity.

In particular, details of the set that carry forward from the earlier play to the latter are the cattle posts and the stairs. In *Translations*, the opening stage directions place the posts in the background: "*Along the back wall are the remains of five or six stalls – wooden posts and chains – where cows were once milked and bedded*" (11). The posts move forward to a more prominent position in *The Communication Cord*. In this position, they can be used to comically demonstrate a quite literal yoking to the past, serving as a physical signal that makes external the potential internal chaining by the past in the former play. In both plays the stairs lead to unseen lofts, but they literally also lead to nowhere. Further, the danger of the broken/missing bannister of the earlier play now extends to the whole set of the latter play. The temporary support beam signals a potential danger which will be realized later when the set (the "too authentic" and therefore false past) threatens to bury them all. Such is the danger of a nostalgia for eloquent poverty.

Whereas *Translations* undercuts its linguistic assertions only indirectly, *The*

Communication Cord certainly does so much more openly. At the beginning of the play, and occasionally throughout, Friel deliberately slows down his farce to call attention to Tim Gallagher's thesis and its subsequent unravelling in action. Etherton calls the entire play "a reflexive demonstration of the thesis" (207). Verstrate, in more detail, sums the thesis up well before agreeing that the action of the play will undermine it:

> The story's central character, Tim Gallagher, is writing a thesis analysis on 'Discourse Analysis with Particular Reference to Response Cries' in which he formulates two levels of communication: that of the exchange of information, and that of the realm of conversation. The latter, according to him, can only be reached if the two partners want to share each other's experience, that is, take off their masks and engage in sincere discourse. The whole play, then, functions as a complete annihilation of his premiss about speech. (95)

As the play proceeds to annihilate his premise, his speeches, Tim, like Hugh, gets increasingly drunk and therefore ridiculous. Richtarik and McGrath also point out Friel's use of Steiner's theories in the undercutting of Tim's thesis. Richtarik notes that the action of the play serves to undermine communication: "The twists in the plot are the result of misunderstanding, misidentifications, and misinterpretations. The farce could be said to constitute an illustration of the hazards of translations in George Steiner's sense of the word" (129). And McGrath sums up Steiner's theory behind the action of the play:

> More than anything else *The Communication Cord* poses Steiner's suggestion (p. 229) that 'possibly we have got hold of the wrong end of the stick altogether when ascribing to the development of speech a primarily informational, a straightforwardly communicative motive.' According to Steiner, 'It is not, perhaps, 'a theory of information' that will serve us best in trying to clarify the nature of language, but a 'theory of misinformation'' (p. 218). For all its farcical nonsense, *The Communication Cord* is just such a theory of misinformation in compact dramatic form. ("Irish Babel" 39)

At the same time as he questions the possibility of communication through language, thereby threatening to divest it of meaning, Friel also reinvests that meaning in the contextual extra-lingual communication of drama. "Throughout the play, the response cries used by the different characters–Tim's 'O my God', Susan's 'It's unbelievable', Claire's 'Yes'–take on completely different meanings in different situations, leading Tim and Claire to conclude that 'Maybe the message doesn't matter at all then....It's the occasion that matters. And the reverberations that the occasion generates' (92)" (Richtarik 133). While Friel ridicules language and response cries like "O my God," this ridicule sets this phrase up to be reinvested with meaning in the chaotic darkness that descends at the end of each act. Drama as a form insists on contextual meaning. Friel chooses to use the dramatic form here, as he does throughout his work, to generate reverberations beyond language. Talking to Ray Comiskey about *The Communication Cord* in comparison to *Translations* Friel said, "It's saying, again, that perhaps communication isn't possible at all....One of the lines in the play is 'Maybe silence is the perfect discourse.' (*Shrugs*) Maybe" (qtd. in Comiskey 8).[127] With this statement and action he reenacts the theme of the play, and perhaps both plays. He both asserts the potential power of silence and then, in a sort of performed stage direction, he undercuts that assertion with a silent contextual shrug and then the repeated response cry, "Maybe," now carrying a different contextual meaning which opposes that asserted by the first use of the word. This speaking here and the act of writing the play, as Comiskey notes (8), by their very existence deny the primacy of silence. If, by the end of the play, ridiculing the power of language to communicate leads to silence as the perfect discourse, then the value of that silence has been built up with language.

In *The Communication Cord*, Friel has chosen to present that language in the context of a farce. Friel has also chosen to contextually link the play with the earlier *Translations*. Kearney describes "the plot [of the latter play] accordingly [functioning] as a farcical rewind of *Translations*" ("Language Play" 49). Heaney expresses a similar view in a personal interview with Richtarik: "'There was something unmistakable about the vehemence of *The Communication Cord*; it was a punitive exercise against stereotypes which he had played with' directed 'first of all at himself...: The genre of farce was corrective to the genre of romantic-historical'" (qtd. in Richtarik 130). Kearney suggests that the corrective cannot revisit the past but only rework it in the present. "The fact that the former play is composed in tragic tones while the latter is written as a farce, is in itself an indicator of Friel's tragi-comic realization that there is no going back in history; that the best that can be achieved is a playful deconstruction and reconstruction of words in the hopes that new modes of communication might be made possible" (Kearney, "Friel and the Politics of Language Play" 511). While Friel may not be able to change the past, to change his earlier play, he can, with the later play, reilluminate it to allow new readings and to allow fresh eyes to see what was already inherent, without necessarily altering it. A deconstruction and reconstruction of the play, as Friel would have with history, could also involve a reevaluation.

---

[127] The famous Gaelic-English love scene in *Translations* is also a form of silence as perfect discourse, for neither lover knows the other's language.

Choosing to use farce as his major technical device allows Friel to reverse the normal order–disbelief becomes belief, the outrageous becomes normal–yet the jokes depend on the normalcy underneath to make the abnormal ridiculous and on the increasing accretion of normal details to lead to an abnormal state. In other words, the comic can only be comic in relation to the seriousness of it. In this context, a communication cord is not only a theory of linguistic communication but also one of dramatic communication, emphasising textuality and contextuality.

While using the devices of classical farce, Friel also exposes the mechanics of a structure he describes as being "like a Meccano set." A farce of course depends on timing, so Friel foregrounds the importance of timing by repeatedly referring to watches in the play. Near the beginning, Tim and Jack synchronize their watches and discuss in detail the timing of their forthcoming plans, a timing which, of course, will immediately go completely awry (15-16). Just after Jack exits and Claire enters, beginning the destruction of the plan, Tim repeatedly looks at his watch and shakes it, not sure if time is being kept (25). Late in the play, in the midst of the utter confusion caused by all the bad timing, Evette displays the watch that Senator Donovan had bought her to prove her identity as his mistress (79): Donovan, already literally chained by the past, is caught by time once again. As Kearney says of progress in the two plays, the deforming "*map* of translation is replaced here by the *watch* of time-keeping" ("Language Play" 49). Later still, when the "misunderstandings, misidentifications, and misinterpretations" begin to be cleared up as they should at the end of a farce, Tim notes that his "watch has stopped" (88). The farce has become unwound. All this focus on the watch and time recalls the manipulation of time in Friel in general and recalls specifically the clock on the wall and the never-ending sense of time in *Philadelphia* and the watch Hugh O'Neill gives to Mabel in *Making History* which underlines Friel's playing with time in the intermissions of that play. By foregrounding the timing of the farce, Friel makes explicit the meccano set of his structure here, and he implies it in his other plays.

Translations, as with any play, also depends on timing; like *The Communication Cord* it also calls attention to a timing that, "at times", verges on the farcical. In the first scene of the play, involving Manus, Sarah, and Jimmy Jack, Friel uses Jimmy Jack's interjections to insert a subtle ridiculing of Sarah's symbolic attempt to speak her name:

> MANUS. Come on Sarah. This is our secret.
>
> (*Again vigorous and stubborn shaking of* SARAH'S *head.*)
>
> MANUS. Nobody's listening. Nobody hears you.
>
> JIMMY. '*Ton d'emeibet epeita thea glaukopis Athene . . .*'
>
> MANUS. Get your tongue and your lips working. 'My name–' Come on. One more try. 'My name is–' Good girl.
>
> SARAH. My . . .
>
> MANUS. Great. 'My name–'
>
> SARAH. My . . . my . . .
>
> MANUS. Raise your head. Shout it Out. Nobody's listening.
>
> JIMMY. '. . . *alla hekelos estai en Atreidao domois . . .*'
>
> MANUS. Jimmy, please! (12)

Both times that Manus assures Sarah that nobody's listening, implying that no one is there, both times that he and we wait for Sarah to speak her name, the voice of Jimmy prattles on at exactly the wrong time, belying Manus' words, filling the silence, and overriding her voice. Later, much of the scene from Maire's entrance (itself remarkably bad romantic timing for Manus as he is caught in what seems to be an incriminating position kissing Sarah's head) until Hugh's entrance involves the timing of a typical "romantic chase" with Manus pursuing and Maire avoiding, both physically and verbally (15-23).

Finally, Hugh's entrance makes clear the potentially farcical timing of the play. Sarah warns everyone that Hugh is coming and suddenly all try to become studious and organized, giving focus to the door where he will enter (22). In the midst of the attempt, Doalty bumps into and then gooses Bridget in a bit of typical farcical slapstick (23). After some moments of intense concentration and work, Doalty, who had earlier comically mimed Hugh's drunkenness and insisted Hugh would not come, now looks around and once again asserts these points. As he does, he draws attention away from the door and the expected entrance, only to have Hugh immediately enter and overhear him. The audience, as well as the characters are led astray by Doalty, making the comic impact of Hugh's entrance even stronger (23). At the same time, while the seriousness of the others before Hugh's entrance builds up the comic suspense, it also reveals that for all the earlier mocking of Hugh's drinking they take him very seriously indeed, creating, as Friel does with the stage directions, a balanced view of him. Pine does note that by viewing *The Communication Cord* in tandem with the earlier play "it becomes possible to realise how *Translations* does have a tendency towards farce, so that Jimmy Jack's, Maire's, and Doalty's lines in particular can be played for more laughs on the stage then they rightly excite on it" (*Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 163). However, invested in a veneration of Hugh and his speeches like many other critics, he omits Hugh from his list, the character whom Friel deliberately sets up both to carry his ideas within the play and to be parodied more than any other character.

Friel also both takes advantage of the repetitive physical slapstick of farce in *The Communication Cord* to create humour, and to expose the mechanical structure of these repetitive actions. In particular, he uses the repetitive actions of the set itself–the door blowing open, the lamp blowing out, and the sudden blow-downs of the fire which engulf

Tim–both to support the comic build of the play and to suggest an underlying figurative and literal structural threat. These repetitions become so rote that Friel increasingly abbreviates his usually very detailed and specific stage directions. For example, near the end, the long description of the blow-downs at the fire and the subsequent response becomes "*He goes to the fireplace. The usual consequences*: O my God, *etc.*" (83). Similar to Hugh's entrance, non-entrance, then entrance in *Translations*, Friel also has these "set" gags work and then not work unexpectedly. When Tim tries to show Susan why he is all covered in smoke and soot, he goes to the fireplace only to have it not blow-down and then, after a pause for a comic double-take, blow-down again for a comic triple-take (51). Similarly, after the doors repeatedly blowing open and the lights repeatedly going out, the doors burst open again but this time, unexpectedly, nothing happens (81). The resultant remaining light will then be in place for the more destructive triple-take of the final plunge into darkness at the end of the play.

The first plunge into darkness just at the act break also exposes the Meccano set of the farce structure. Friel builds Act One into a ridiculous crescendo with Donovan chained to the post and with all the other plot-twists introduced so far colliding ridiculously, culminating in a blackout which, ironically, reflects the state of complete confusion. Friel then repeats the last few moments of Act One at the beginning of Act Two, freezing the action. He maintains momentum by doing so but also suggests a sense of stasis. The characters are trapped in this machine until the clock winds down. The unities of time, place, and action seem literally crushing.

But, most of the time, the darkness is not total for the audience. Just before the end of the act, Friel initiates a practical convention so that the audience can see the action: "*now sneak the lights up to half. The assumption will be that the stage is still in total darkness. The actors behave as if it were*" (64). This practical convention which continues and is repeated (64-7, 76-8) serves, as in Peter Shaffer's *Black Comedy*, as a physical reminder of the audience's position at this point and with this, and any, farce in general. The Brechtian device of the semi-darkness illustrates that the audience's understanding is superior to that of the characters.

The omniscient sense of audience understanding with regards to light, and the events of the farce, is reminiscent of the audience's superior linguistic understanding in *Translations*.

"The romance of Maire and Yolland is a familiar Romeo-and-Juliet motif given added theatrical possibilities by their mutual misunderstandings and the quite classically comic higher awareness granted to the audience" (Rabey, *British and Irish Political Drama* 190). Referring to Owen's original "translation" between, ostensibly, two languages in Lancey's instructions for the students (30-33), Roche notes that "this is all done through the medium of English, however, which gives a farcical tone from the audience's point of view to the mutual incomprehension of both sides" (*Contemporary* 249). This farcical vein continues with the translations of English to Irish and vice-versa such as the one between Yolland, Maire, and Owen (47-8), and of course in the famous non-communicating but communicating love scene between Yolland and Maire (49-53). Rabey also notes however the price of that understanding. Members of the audience cannot use their superior knowledge to alter the understandings of the characters: "The idea of an all-encompassing understanding is not a vague utopian ideal, because Friel *makes the audience experience it* within the play -- but with tragic exclusiveness (*British and Irish Political Drama* 191).

In contrast, in *The Communication Cord* the final returning of the lights signals a beginning of the end to the barriers of misunderstanding and a comic inclusion which seems to envelop the community of characters. "When the light returns the truth begins to dawn; the aliases and the alibis are debunked and the artifices of the confounding language games exposed" (Kearney "Friel and the Politics of Language Play" 514). Going back at least to Greek New Comedy the audience expect this happy ending with marriages, or at least matches between the proper couples, restoring the community. "But in *The Communication Cord*, just as the setting misleads us to believe that we are in a rural Irish cottage and to expect another peasant play, so the plot proves to be more of a parody of a genre than the genuine article" (Ferris 127). After the watch stops and the farce is supposed to wind down, instead "as all of the lovers find their proper mates and it seems that the plot is at last happily resolved, Tim and Claire, in a passionate embrace, inadvertently lean against the upright which is supporting the sagging ceiling of the cottage. Then the upper floor comes crashing down upon them, the lamp dies, and the play ends in total darkness" (Ferris 128). Ferris exaggerates slightly, but understandably here. The floor is about to crash down but the lights go out and the play ends before it does. When the lights return to total black at the end of the play they signal an end to our superior audience position. Rather than knowing the ending, we too are left literally in the dark. By denying us complete knowledge of their fate, Friel challenges the audience position, making us review our simple, and supposedly superior, understanding, and perhaps making us look for the tragic behind the comic.

Jessica Milner Davis says of farce that "if the conflict is allowed to escape its stylized and care-free 'play-frame', farce becomes cynical, a piece of black, absurdist comedy" (24). Ferris suggests that the darkness at the end of *The Communication Cord* has just such cynical implications: "Because we are in the terrain of comedy, we laugh at this mishap, but the dark apocalyptic ending of the play suggests a crumbling, disintegrating society. At this point we begin to realize, if we have not done so earlier, that we are in the marginal world where comedy borders on tragedy" (128-9). Friel himself says that "A farce is a very serious business. It's supposed to entertain and be very funny, and if it isn't it has failed as a farce...(*Laughs*) You say that and get it out of the way. But then, I think that it's a perfectly valid way of looking at people in Ireland today, that our situation has become so absurd and so...crass that it seem to me it might be a valid way to talk and write about it" (qtd. in Comiskey 8).

On the other hand, Friel also balances such a serious view of the play with other comments, indicating that the play should be taken lightly. "Unlike my other plays, I have written it [*The Communication Cord*] primarily to give pleasure" (qtd. in Richtarik 128). O'Toole certainly agrees, calling it, in his review, "a slight work, one that need not tempt the unwary into exaggerations, but it is very easy to enjoy" ("Barriers" 52). Friel adds "that for his part he did not deliberately intend the play to be full of symbolism but he adds with a grin that no doubt some people, particularly the academics will find symbolism in the work" (qtd. in Richtarik 131-2). But this poking fun at academics must also include himself and his company. Many reviewers, for example, reacted strongly against the academic essays by Field Day directors Tom Paulin and Seamus Deane in the programme for the original production of the play. For example, Gerald Dawe says, "Tom Paulin and Seamus Deane...make...heavy weather of this light-hearted play, and sap it of its dramatic simplicity. Perhaps this is symptomatic of something else -- that too much attention has been given to Field Day's significance (cultural and otherwise)" (67).[128] The mocking of academics here serves to mock the overly pious responses to *Translations* as well. Appropriately, Friel has his tongue firmly in his cheek. He mocks Tim's, the academic's thesis in the play, but he still examines it and uses Steiner's ideas as well: Friel himself admits, "Maybe it's different from a regular farce in that the play itself was to some extent an attempt to illustrate a linguistic thesis" (qtd. in O'Toole "Man From God Knows Where 21). Friel applies his habitual skepticism and belief to scholars and their theories: He mocks scholars throughout his work, but he also feels the need to include them, garnering both laughs and ideas.

Keith Jeffery criticizes *The Communication Cord* for the "cerebral excursions which interrupt the basically sensual requirements of farce" (1130). Similarly, one might criticize, in an inverse manner, the comic interruption of Hugh's final elegiac speech in *Translations*. In both plays, however, Friel wants this balance, this ability to express beyond the boundaries of the genre. Especially, given the focus in both plays on the difficulty of communication, Friel wants to avail himself of any opportunities for expression beyond the accepted codes. Pine notes that "it is easy to see why Friel wants us to regard *Translations* and *The Communication Cord* as twins, each feeding off the other's dramatic form to impress on us the atrocious dangers of communication of any kind" (*Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 183). With more hope, Kearney argues, "Friel's insistence that *Translations* and *The Communication Cord* be considered 'in tandem', suggests that their respective claims – the claims of...mythologization and demythologization of silence and speech – are perhaps *both* valid in some sense, serving as two arches of a mutually sustaining dialectic" (Kearney, "Language Play" 53). The plays, similarly, build two arches of a formal dialectic of farce and tragedy both between them and within each individually.

---

[128] Others in the collective review of the play in *Theatre Ireland* also criticize Paulin and Deane: see Roades (67-8), Porter (68), and Simmons (69).

Near the end of *Translations*, Hugh claims that "confusion is not an ignoble condition" (67). Much in the play, as critics like Elmer Andrews point out (178), suggests that Friel endorses this position. But of course the unspoken implication of the line is that neither is confusion particularly noble. Hugh as a character asserts both the need to change and represents stasis. Any movement must occur from within the balance. Friel certainly identifies with Hugh here: "I think most of us [at least in Ireland] live in confusion. I live in confusion" (qtd. in Agnew 61). These words, in the play and the interview, suggest both a commitment to and a lack of faith in the Field Day enterprise, but also that it is necessary to take a part in that attempt. Like the Paycock and Joxer Daly at the end of *Juno and the Paycock*, Hugh and Jimmy seem to inhabit a world "in a terr . . . ible state o' . . . chassis," but Hugh (like Friel) seems more able and more likely to move forward, uncertainly, from within this precarious balance. Hugh has at any rate at least promised the action of teaching Maire English, even without knowing whether it will be effective or not.

The ending of *The Communication Cord* also recalls O'Casey's *Juno* and, as Rafroidi notes (113), his *Purple Dust*. At the end, the stage in *Juno* is stripped bare, while in *Purple Dust* it is flooded. In either case, as with *The Communication Cord*, the result is the destruction of the very world of the plays, suggesting throughout the plays an ever present dangerous tension between the characters and their surroundings. *The Communication Cord* also recalls in its setting the attempt at a supposedly authentic restoration of an ancient house that serves as part of the plot and setting of *Purple Dust*. O'Casey mocks a false English presence in an otherwise potentially authentic Ireland, while Friel goes further to also mock faux-Irish authenticity. In *Purple Dust*, the lovers escape the restraining house and reclaim their heritage. Similarly, in Friel, the lovers do manage to connect beyond the stultification of language, glorying in the communication of silence. "At final black out the whole house, the prison-house of language, is falling down" (Welch 145). But if the prison-house of language is destroyed, so too is the silence destroying the actual house, pulling it down upon the inhabitants, and, with their elimination, destroying the significance of the silence itself. "The hint of some salvation through silence is counteracted by the literal unleashing of darkness and destruction" (Kearney "Friel and the Politics of Language Play" 514). Still, at the same time, Friel, like O'Casey in *Purple Dust*, ascribes a power to real love, to an authentic communication cord, in language or not, a power so great that it can destroy the inauthentic world of the play. "Tim and Claire's wordless communication, enacted in a kiss, the first authentic human contact in the play, is the discovery of a radically subversive 'realism', which brings the cottage tumbling down" (Elmer Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel* 197).[129] As Kearney says, "Silence is a double-edged sword heralding *both* the beginning of love *and* the end of society" ("Friel and the Politics of Language Play" 514).

The Maire/Yolland love scene in *Translations* presents similar challenges. Their love is also authentic, perhaps more so than Tim and Claire's, is also one that tries to escape the past, and it too is threatened by the surrounding world of the play. Though in *Translations* it will be the real world that will extinguish the fantasy of their love while in *The Communication Cord* the false world will smother the brief spark of their real love, both plays present a kind of hope through the communication of that love. Although Yolland disappears, and is presumably killed immediately after this scene, the powerful image of their bond lives on. Despite the collapse of the house at the end, at least Tim and Claire have made a real connection. And, indeed, it could be argued that their honest and authentic attitudes have contributed to the destruction of a (false) house of deceit, of a false romanticism. This moment is real romance instead of a manipulated (and manipulable) romanticism.

In both plays, Friel refuses to show the consequences. Because we don't see Yolland killed, we remember instead (or at least as well) the potential hope of their union. We remember them attempting to connect through speech and silence, their attempt at an authentic translation. At the end of *The Communication Cord*, in total silence and darkness, the house seems about to fall down, but it doesn't before the play ends. Rather than focussing solely on the destruction, Friel also leaves us with an image of the physical connection which precipitated it and the discourse which preceded that. "Maybe silence is the perfect discourse"(92). Maybe. Friel leaves us with ambiguity, suggesting, perhaps, that we look for possible "answers" to the communication question in the gap between silence and speech. Certainly his medium, the stage, reveals the power of language, of silence, and the interplay between the two. Formally, these plays "seen in tandem" can reveal the power of the tragic, the comic, and, especially, the interplay between the two, characteristic of Friel's work.

---

[129] O'Brien expresses a similar idea in his *Brian Friel* (110).

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Give Me Your Questions, Do!

> That uncertainty is necessary. He must live with that uncertainty, that necessary uncertainty. Because there can be no verdicts, no answers. Indeed there *must* be no verdicts. Because being alive is the postponement of verdicts, isn't it? Because verdicts are provided only when it's all over, all concluded.
>
> (*Give Me Your Answer, Do!* 79-80 – 1997)

> Oh, Tom!—Tom!—Tom, please?—
> *Pause. Quick Black.*
> (*Give Me Your Answer, Do!* 84)

Through the character Daisy in his most recent original play, Friel demands no verdicts, yet the imperative of my form demands that I provide one. I plan to reappraise his certain uncertainties in his consideration and construction of identities, male and female roles, and the author and the authored. I will look again at his, often undercutting, self-reflexivity concerning performance and the nature of performed roles and concerning communication of any kind. Of course, I will return to my conception of Friel's formal play and will also consider others' differing formulations of Friel's form, reconsidering my own definition, my own creation of a form from his play. I will come back to crippling and Friel's attempted transcendence of language, identity, myth, and space through his qualified theatrical transcendence of the gap between audience and performance and consider what this crippled transcendence offers to fractured selves in search of "authentic" homes, before finally considering my own position, the position of the academic, in and with relation to Friel.

In *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* Friel returns to many of the concerns that have vexed him throughout his work, and particularly to the role of the healer/writer and the healed. Like Friel, I intend to use this play to reflect on, summarize, and synthesize my writings on this particular healer/writer and his body of work. The opening quotation above is Daisy's answer to the question of the play, and implicitly to Friel's career to the moment: do not sell out, do not embrace certainty, or the creative spark of the writer will die. Inspired by the visit of an academic to buy Friel's papers and so to judge the worth of his career, *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* reflects on the body of his work. About this aspect Richard Pine says,

> He [Friel] has returned not to any particular phase or aspect of his work but to *all* his work. The self-assessment of writer Tom Connolly and the assessment of him by collector David Knight are both autobiographical, in the sense, firstly, that Friel was visited by the representative of an American university with an offer to purchase his personal archive; and secondly, that the play in which this is shown to us is a personal revisiting and rewriting of all his previous work.[130]
>
> ("Love: Brian Friel's *Give Me Your Answer, Do!*" 177)

Daisy's words in the first epigraph respond to the ending of *Faith Healer*, replying to Frank Hardy. They reject his artistic solution, his attempt to author himself, as the form of that play did by insisting on alternate truths: there, the embracing of certainty is fatal. Ironically, Daisy is, as José Lanters notes, "at her most absolute when she defends 'the Necessary Uncertainty'" ("Brian Friel's Uncertainty Principle" 171). The second epigraph above, soon after, serves to answer the first. At the end of the play, Daisy doesn't answer, she insistently questions. Reversing the trend of the action of the play, she is now asking her husband, "Tom, Tom, give me your answer, do!" The latter functions as Friel's typical abdication, within the play, of the certainty of the first.[131] Paradoxically, by undermining the earlier speech, the latter reinforces the value of the former's message of necessary uncertainty by making the messenger necessarily uncertain and by leaving the audience in the same position. "The cause of her anxiety remains deliberately open to speculations" (Lanters, "Brian Friel's Uncertainty Principle" 174). Rather than recalling the certainty of Frank Hardy in *Faith Healer*, Daisy's latter speech echoes the self-doubt of Gar's "I don't know. I–I–I don't know." at the end of *Philadelphia*. And, as with that ending, this one too is deliberately stark: "Daisy's gesture of despair...is the most frightening and disturbing moment in a play so bleak that one wonders in trepidation where Friel might ask us to accompany him after this" (Pine, "Love" 188). Thirty-three years after *Philadelphia* Friel once again returns to a bleak, stagnating notion of identity, one that needs guidance or affirmation from without, from somewhere, in order to sustain itself.

---

[130] In a programme note to the play and again in his article (181-2) Pine charts echoes of Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, *Crystal and Fox*, *Aristocrats*, *Faith Healer*, *Wonderful Tennessee*, and *Molly Sweeney*.

[131] Friel gives and then abdicates his assessment of the characters, especially the writer, as embracing the Necessary Uncertainty and a "Beckettian going on" with life in a letter to Richard Pine (qtd. in Pine, "Love" 180). His final comment in his "Sporadic Dairy" on the play is, also, a very appropriate questioning of his own going on with that

But this time, as with the change from male to female of *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*, the certain and then uncertain speaker is female rather than male. Opposed to the certainty of the male author is the uncertain female authored. Her role is defined in relation to his. Their daughter Bridget is also defined by Tom. The only life we experience her having is in his words, his flights of fancy. Like Grace in *Faith Healer* both Bridget and Daisy need Tom to sustain their existence as his fictions and, like Grace, their need cripples them. Daisy repeats the closed eye invocations of Grace in *Faith Healer*, at the beginning and end of the play (17, 82) and in response to her father Jack's kleptomania (66-7). She tries to invoke a different reality, to shut out the one she experiences, but, like Grace who does not get better despite her claims, Daisy opens her eyes to greater and greater bleakness as the play goes on. Even Maggie, the successful woman in the play, has her life "shaped" and "deformed" by her husband, the showman, Jack (67). Claudia W. Harris calls for positive role models for women in Friel: "Where are the active, competent women, those successfully managing homes and families and rewarding jobs, those exploiting the range of possibilities open to them, those equal to their challenges, those happily enjoying life?" (69) But, even at their most successful, characters in Friel's plays,

---

embrace: "After *this* play, surely I should be able to cope with the Necessary Uncertainty?" (30 September 1996, 172) male or female, cannot escape from the influence of their crippling, limiting context.[132]

Friel deliberately parallels Bridget Connolly and Molly Sweeney. Friel's latest original play picks up where the previous one left off. The play begins with Bridget alone downstage centre in a pool of light and with the rest of the stage in darkness. Like Molly, Bridget has the focus of centre stage. Replacing Molly as the female in the asylum, she seems at this point to be the heart of the story. "Molly Sweeney's privacy culminates here" (Pine, "Love" 185). But Tom comes on from the left, as Friel's narrators and storytellers always do, and takes over the story. Tom also takes over from both Mr. Rice and Frank and their connection to the absent father from *Molly Sweeney*, trying to cast her into his fictions, his enabling pattern. As part of his fiction, Tom describes both Daisy and Bridget as possessing the same sort of self-assured ease that was possible at the end of *Lughnasa* and for Molly before her operation: "And there was your mother...conducting with such assurance, with her eyes closed and her whole body swaying, and away off in some private world of her own, just as you go off into your own world sometimes, too, don't you?" (13) This time the grace is only ever a deception, only ever a grace in words, casting suspicion back on those earlier words of Friel's. Bridget goes off much too far "into her own world." She, like Molly in her "borderline country," lives a bleak existence that can only be imagined as graceful. Tom claims that Bridget is "beautiful and mysterious as ever" (11, 82). Is she? He constructs a beautiful, mysterious image of her but the rest of his speech to her indulges in fiction and hyperbole. As the stage directions indicate, the reality may be quite different: "*Her mouth is open and her eyes are wide and she stares vacantly in front of her*" (11). The culmination of Molly's privacies indeed. As a young woman whose identity is constructed by the words of a male, she recalls Friel's other symbolic portrayals of woman as Ireland. Like those before her, such as the mute Sarah in *Translations* and the eventually deranged Molly in *Molly Sweeney*, Bridget the actual woman reveals how her status as symbolic deforms her.

---

[132] As Elena Capecchi notes, the very existence of the Border between North and South makes for an inevitably distorted and dismembered or crippled context (280). Or as Christopher Murray says more crudely regarding a comparison of the Ugandan leper colony to the Mundy family in *Lughnasa*, Friel contrasts "cripples who can dance and the cripples who cannot, in two versions of postcolonial society" ("'Recording Tremors'" 35). Crippling is a pre-condition.

Daisy's role as spokesperson for Friel within the play mirrors Hugh O'Donnell's role in *Translations*. Fuelled by alcohol, like Hugh, her state tends to undercut her pronouncements. Her stage Irish quality of drunkenness undermines her stage Irish quality of eloquence. Yet there is a balance. Friel describes her, as he does Hugh, as "*loosened by drink but by no means drunk*" (50). Paul Taylor reviewed Geraldine James's borderline portrayal of Daisy in the 1998 Hampstead production of the play as being "the most glowingly beautiful go-to-seed incipient alcoholic you're ever likely to see" (14). After she delivers the speech on the necessity of uncertainty, she immediately drinks (79-80). In fact, she immediately gives up her virtuous, certain secret vow and drinks gin and "stagger[s] on" instead (80). Her physical staggering then echoes Hugh's placement for his final "elegiac" speech as "*she goes up the steps and pauses at the top*"(80). From her dominant position, she toasts the 'Necessary Uncertainty,' both celebrating the idea and mocking it. Daisy, even at "her most absolute," remains split. And of course, the play ends not with this "elegiac" speech but with Daisy's anxious questioning, which also undercuts, balances, and, paradoxically, fulfills an absolute view of the message of 'Necessary Uncertainty.'

Tom, as storyteller, recalls the powers of Frank Hardy, poised between the possibility of a miracle and the likelihood of a con. As a healer, Tom performs: he "*very deliberately animates himself*" (11, 82), at beginning and end, to role-play with Bridget. He enacts both sides of their conversation, deliberately conning himself and aware of the con, aware of a healing that can never work. "There'll be no change. Ever" (54). Friel deliberately parallels this act of healing with Tom's writing. Potential hope at the end comes from his possibly being able to write the novel he has been working on for five years (83-4), from his acceptance of Necessary Uncertainty, whereas at the beginning he lied about it to her and himself (14-15). Now he may create more sustaining fictions.

Friel foregrounds his revisiting of his own canon with a sustained self-reflexivity. All the calling to the canon outlined by Pine and by me above may be implicit, but Friel takes pains to make it explicit as well. Most obviously, as Pine notes ("Love" 176, 177), *Give Me* recalls *Aristocrats* in setting, pace, tone, and characterization. Reviewer Paul Taylor describes *Give Me* as "one of Friel's tragi-comical homages to Chekov" (14), and many critics, in turn, have described *Aristocrats* as Friel's most Chekhovian play. In this, appropriately Chekhovian, repetition, Friel has the writer, Tom, quote Chekhov and then prod David to guess the source (19). Friel temporarily places the audience in David's position, guessing at Tom's, and Friel's, source, and then provides the answer for him and us (20). With the particular attention brought by suspense to this extended quotation game, Friel calls attention to his own Chekhovian constructions in this play and in earlier ones. Throughout, Friel's continued use of quotations from his and others' work repeatedly emphasizes the self-reflexive nature of this text.

At the end, Friel returns to cyclicality with a vengeance. Other plays of his may have done so less obviously, but this one insists on an almost exact repetition of the first scene at the end, though with subtle differences.[133] Now, there can be no doubt that we're "waiting for Godot with tickets to Philadelphia." Friel says of the play that "each of the...characters...is looking for a verdict, an answer to his/her dilemma. And settles for the Beckettian going on" (qtd. in Pine, "Love" 180). He calls attention to his Beckettian quoting very deliberately within the play. When Jack enters, he describes Daisy as "vibrant" though she doesn't move (27). Later, Friel makes clear reference to Vladimir and Estragon from *Godot* who, of course, speak of moving while remaining still:

> TOM. (*To* DAISY *–in doorway*) Aren't you going to join us?
>
> DAISY. Yes.
>
> *She does not move.* (64-5)

This allusion to *Godot* calls attention to Friel's overall cyclical structural allusion to Beckett.[134] Because of the foregrounding of Bridget in the first scene of the play, as an

---

[133] See Lanters' "Brian Friel's Uncertainty Principle" 172-4 for a detailed description of the repetitions and alterations.

[134] Of course it also makes clear reference to the influence of Beckett on Friel, and his contemporaries, which Anthony Roche has explored at some length in his

audience we are "waiting for Bridget," for what will happen in her story, but she never changes. Like Godot "she
is the unexplained shadow which casts itself over the play" (Pine, "Love" 185)

Aside from alluding to other texts to signal its own self-reflexive status as a text, the play also foregrounds its own theatrical nature through the deliberate role-playing of the characters. We have seen that, at both beginning and end, Tom animates himself and performs both himself and, to some extent, Bridget. When he first enters the regular world of the play and sees his assessor David, "*he smiles resolutely and assumes a vigour and an enthusiasm he does not feel*" (19). Just as in the more extreme situation with Bridget, he assumes roles in his normal life as well.

Friel emphasizes theatrical playing through Jack as well. From Jack's first entrance "*with a faintly theatrical air*" he maintains a facade of showmanship (25). On his next entrance, Jack once again calls attention to his own theatricality and that of the play by singing the title song twice and by striking "*a theatrical pose*" to do so (35-7). The deliberate theatrical repetition of the title also calls attention to the play as play rather than as illusion of reality, as does Tom's speaking of that title as a serious question at the end just after Daisy's speech on the Necessary Uncertainty (81).[135] When Jack and Daisy dance

---

Contemporary Irish Theatre: From Beckett to McGuinness. Like Beckett, Friel tries to express the ineffable just beyond normal communication, but, unlike Beckett, Friel insists on a much closer illusion of normalcy. His theatre is "absurd" only in relation to its insistence on the everyday. Of course, properly done, Beckett's theatre too only works in relation to a normal or standard reality from which it diverges, but its divergences are starker, more symbolic, and much more in the foreground. As Robert Welch says, "Friel's theatre...is like Beckett's, a theatre obsessed with language; but unlike Beckett's this theatre conveys the difficulty of communication by underlining the normality of failure rather than the failure of normality" (138).

[135] The repetition of the song lyric title of the play also recalls the reiterations of the title in *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* And the ending of *Give Me* too seems to be right back where it started from. Just as the second line of that earlier title in ways more accurately described what was going on underneath the surface action, so too does the next line of this play's title. In *Give Me Your Answer, Do!*, the characters, beneath the surface, seem literally "half-crazy all for the love of you" though the "you" is not necessarily specified. In the end, the implications of madness in the second half of this play's title come back to

in a style somewhere between high theatricality and self-mockery and with as much elegance as his carpet-slippers and her bare feet will permit" (61-2), they serve to underscore the theatrical balance in the play between self-mockery and elegance. Finally, Jack reveals his playing of himself to Tom: "So I sing, I dance, I play, keep it bubbly, act out the fake affections–only way I can cope" (74). *Give Me* insists on the performative nature of roles assumed inside the play, and, by calling attention to that insistence, on the role-playing outside the play as well. It also reveals the deceptions and limitations of such playing. In his "Sporadic Diary" on the play, Friel notes that "when the unspoken is spoken, it is as if the actor puts on a vocal mask" (4 March 1995, 166). Friel shows in this play that the actor has to remove the assumed social mask of the character before donning this vocal mask, before making the vocal change which will reveal a truth underneath. But, as Friel's term "vocal mask" suggests, even the speaking of truth, of the unspoken, must still be linked to constructed performance at the same time as truthful essence.

The entrance of Garret and Gráinne seals their nature as performers. Friel has them signal their coming vocally, and then he builds suspense, as in a Greek tragedy, while we wait for them to physically enter (41-2). Jack draws overt attention to the length of their theatrical entrance: "Whoever they are, they aren't going to take us by stealth, are they?" (42) When they do enter, she carries "*an enourmous bouquet of dramatic roses*" and they perform a self-aware enthusiastic and energetic "*double-act*" (42). Shortly after, Gráinne drops the social mask when alone with Garret and, with a different vocal tone, she quietly describes "that performance, that ugly bitter act we put on when we're with people" (48). Reviewer Paul Taylor recognized their performance as a "wonderfully waspish...double act of veiled mutual recrimination" (14). Friel calls attention to the relationship between performers and audience through their double-act. By foregrounding them as an act when in front of others, and then having them relax when alone, Friel has them test, as they say

---

focus on Bridget as the nadir of dysfunction in the play. Her condition also recalls Gar's eventual paralytic split condition in *Philadelphia* and his singing of "Give Me Your Answer, Do!," though addressed to his father, Screwballs, rather than to Daisy (88). Of course, as Harry White notes, the use of Mendelssohn in *Give Me* also echoes *Philadelphia* ("Brian Friel and the Condition of Music"13).

themselves, the limits "that the audiences impose...on how far we can go" (48-9) and when, in front of an audience, how far they can "transgress...the necessary boundary" (69). In his career, Friel has constantly sought to find and test limits, acknowledge and cross borders. His deliberate deviousness in form, a deviousness he calls attention to by foregrounding the performative nature of this seemingly naturalistic play, accepts the limits that the audience imposes at the very moment that it transgresses them.

Friel punctuates Daisy's theatricality as well. Besides parallelling her with Hugh O'Donnell and his stage Irish qualities of drinking and eloquence, he links a mock-theatricality to an undercutting of her insights:

> DAISY. It struck me–smack! (*She hits her forehead with exaggerated theatricality*)–that's where it struck me–. . . . It struck me how wretched you [writers] are. You're unhappy in the world you inhabit and you're more unhappy with the fictional world you create; so you drift through life like exiles from both places. (52)

Her gesture highlights the importance of the insight to follow at the same time that it mocks it. Her theatrical gesture recalls Boucicault on communicating messages to the audience: "The only impression that can be made on the skull of the public must be made with a tenpenny nail, always struck on the head" (qtd. in Keogh 35). Friel has her give his insight on the nature of the writer while she mocks the theatrical giving of insights. Her pronouncements on writers here and at the end are both asserted and then undermined. Further revealing the artifice behind this truth, Garret describes this exchange between Tom and Daisy as "plagiarizing our act" (53). To reveal this truth, Tom and Daisy perform Garret and Gráinne's act; they, in turn, perform that act to conceal their truths. Tom's quotation from *Twelfth Night* which follows Daisy's speech also underlines and undermines the dramatic artifice at this point:

> TOM. 'If this were played upon a stage now/ I would condone it as improbable fiction.' (52)

Paul Taylor certainly criticises parts of the play for being "improbable" and "dreadfully stagey" (14), but that of course is the point. Friel wants to emphasize both the staginess and the fictionality of the piece as he constructs it. Reviewing the Friel-directed original production of the play, Mic Moroney noted the effectiveness of this tactic: "Friel's fetishistic attentions to his own text does worm its way uncomfortably into some private recess of your mind" (qtd. in Pine, "Love" 183). The playful change he makes from the source in this quotation reveals Friel's preference for stagey fiction. The original reads, "If this were played upon a stage now/I could condemn it as improbable fiction (III, iv, 140-1). Rather than "condemn," Friel "would condone" this fiction on stage and his calling attention to it.

Friel underlines the construction of this play by having the two writers, Tom and Garret, discuss writing a play on the philosopher Wittgenstein and his visits to Connemara (71). The two, who together seem to represent a balance in Friel between a writer of integrity and one of popular appeal, discuss the process of writing the play much as Friel does in his "Sporadic Diaries." Their discussion serves on one level to mock Friel's canon–how different is Wittgenstein in Connemara from Steiner in Ballybeg?–and on another to reveal Friel's own understanding and use of Wittgenstein within this play, which he notes in his "Diary." "In imposing the self-discipline of *saying only what can be said* and thus enjoining silence in the realm of metaphysics, genuine metaphysical impulses are released. The unsayable is not said but is nevertheless manifest" (17 April 1995, 167). Once again, Friel will focus on the power, or lack of it, of language and of silence, and particularly of silence created by, and juxtaposed to, language. Garret describes his plans to write his Wittgenstein project as "a fiction–a faction maybe–maybe a bloody play" (71). By doing so he exposes the nature of Friel's dramaturgy throughout his body of work: the balancing of popularity and integrity, language and silence, and fictions and fact(ion)s, in, sometimes bloody, play.

Friel's highlighting of the role-playing in the play returns to his by now ubiquitous explorations of the difficulties of communication. The monologue/dialogue nature of the frame, in which Tom imagines Bridget's dialogue in order to continue his monologue, hints at a similar communication, and lack of it, in the seemingly naturalistic dialogue in the rest of the play. In his diary on the play, Friel stated his early desire to explore a lack of communication in seemingly naturalistic connections: "The Husband/Artist and Wife employ a duologue that (a) moves on totally different levels so that there is no *apparent* exchange between them; (b) consists every so often of interior monologue that sounds as if it were a *normal* part of their duologue but is in fact emerging from a private depth" ("Extracts *Give Me*" 4 March 1995, 166). Lanters quotes Helen Meany's review of the original production to show the results on stage: "The lyrical monologues of *Molly Sweeney* 'have given way to elliptical exchanges of the ensemble; characters speak past and through each other'" ("Brian Friel's Uncertainty Principle" 167). The inability to reach the "unsayable" depths troubles the sayable surface to such an extent that it almost ceases to exist. Instead, the characters are left with a surface role-playing to disguise their communicative lack. Only when the interior monologue emerges from its private depth does a glimpse at the unsayable depths become possible. Whereas Friel created dia-monologues or monologues that almost became dialogues, almost connected, in *Molly Sweeney*, in *Give Me* he creates mono-dialogues, deconstructing dialogue into almost unconnected monologue, revealing the artifice in this seeming naturalism and of the role-players in the theatre, and in life outside the theatre, and underscoring the difficulty of achieving real convergence.

The self-reflexive elements in *Give Me* remind the audience of Friel's overall formal play. By creating such devices as the mono-dialogues, pointed to by the Bridget frame at beginning and end, he presents a naturalistic play and disrupts it, foregrounding the Stanislavskian yet insisting on the Brechtian as well. The continual insistence on the performing of roles in life and in the play creates a sort of *gestus* within naturalism, showing roles chosen and other possible roles to choose. In other words, the over-foregrounding of the Stanislavskian, in the play, disrupts it. But the most theatrical contrivance in the play, and the one that most clearly presents its own, and the play's, theatricality, is the series of spatial, musical, and visible disruptions in the framing device, which first unsettles, and then ultimately blends with, the naturalistic world.

By opening the play with a stark pool of light focussed on a bleak character in a minimalist setting, Friel strips the surface decoration of naturalism, suggesting something deeper. By placing her down centre, Friel also implies that she is the central figure, the core, of the story. Late in this scene, faint music plays which the audience hears but the characters on stage do not (15). When the scene changes, that music floods the stage, as do the lights which illuminate a detailed naturalistic scene (16). The music links the bare depths of the frame with the rich surface of the centre, suggesting a faint image of Bridget underscoring the rest of the play just as the music faintly underscores the end of the frame. The obviousness of that theatrical linking also serves to imply the theatrical underneath the natural in both settings. Similarly, the lights which separate the two settings also serve to link them by that stark contrast. The incorporation within the text of the physical moving of Bridget's bed off stage most clearly suggests both the connections between the two spaces (which are after all one space) and the performances in both of them (16). In order to change to the next scene, the bed must be removed, but it could easily be removed during a technical convention such as a blackout by stagehands or the actors out of character, a breaking of scene and character that ironically would function to preserve the illusion of character within the scenes. Instead, Friel has Tom and the Nurse, in character, wheel the bed off. The moving does have a naturalistic explanation, but the immediate and severe light change after they exit can't help but imply the obvious dramatic necessity behind the move. The naturalism and the naturalistic characters disrupt themselves. And the spatial implications remain. "The way that Tom's nonsense talk to or with Bridget spills over into the play proper threatens the world of the play with a profound nihilism" (Pine, "Love" 178). Bridget continues as a powerful lingering presence beneath the play, an absent presence downstage centre. The switch from the frame to the centre of the play also disrupts the audience by frustrating our expectations. The opening staging implies that Bridget is the centre before it wheels her off into the wings. We expect the story to be about her, but it is so only tangentially. She is off stage centre rather than downstage centre.

At the end of the play, the reappearance of the frame returns us to the focus of our original expectations, and frustrates our frustrated focus, implying that the centre of the play was not its heart either. "Although the main body of the play is structured in a straight narrative line in the present tense, the closing monologue undermines this apparently straightforward procedure" (White, "Brian Friel and the Condition of Music" 14). Again, music first indicates the linking of the spaces. The return of Mendelssohn's "On Wing of Song" signals the cyclical reappearance of the frame (80). In a pause, while Tom and Daisy listen to the music, the Nurse wheels Bridget's bed back to its position downstage centre (81). Tom and Daisy carry on speaking as if the bed were not there, but this physical intrusion exposes to the audience that, metaphorically, the bed was always present. As José Lanters says, "The 'two worlds' of reality and fiction are now seen on stage simultaneously" ("Brian Friel's Uncertainty Principle" 173). But, of course, which world is which? Finally, the entire frame recommences with Daisy resuming her dissolute, close-eyed slump in the deck chair from the beginning of the play, the pool of light coming up on Bridget, and Tom entering left and deliberately animating himself (82). But, since the other lights only come down to half (80), the rest of the stage is semi-visible now too. Just as Bridget's space intruded on Daisy's, now Daisy's does so on Bridget's. The Stanislavskian world which was disrupted by the more Brechtian, now disrupts it in turn. Ultimately both worlds blend: both realities, both fictions are linked, intruding on, and juxtaposed to, each other. Daisy's final crying question emphasizes this intrusion and this balance as she responds to what is happening in the other setting, which is also in the same space. After this cry the lights go to black quickly, leaving a dark, mysterious, balanced and uncertain space and image, hinting at the unsayable and, possibly, the unanswerable.

Other Forms of Brian Friel?

This mysterious uncertain ending would seem to support a different theatrical analysis such as Elmer Andrews' categorization of Friel's formal play.[136] He argues that Friel attempts to reach transcendence through the methods of Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, and Peter Brook. Andrews notes that "Friel...demonstrates a wish to go beyond or behind what words can achieve and...to experiment with silences and rythmical speech in an effort to express the irrational, pre-verbal level of being" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 210). He then compares this wish with the desire of Artaud's theatre to "express a fundamental irrationality in human life" (212). His views would be supported by, among others, Nicholas Grene who feels that "through much of Friel's work...there is a quest for this sort of truth beyond the body" ("Friel and Transparency" 137). Friel certainly does want to transcend, to find that "even in confusion and disillusion, strength and courage can exist, and that out of them can come a redemption of the human spirit" ("Theatre of Hope and Despair" 17). He adds that playwrights, "in the middle of the ruins on the other side of nihilism . . ., are preparing a renaissance" (17). Yet this seeking for irrationality, for a truth beyond the body, depends upon the prior existence of both the rational and the body in his work. Recognizing Friel's less revolutionary approach, his intentional deviousness, Andrews limits his categorization, noting that Friel

---

[136] See his *The Art of Brian Friel*, and particularly the chapter "Body."

> does not approach the radical transformations that Artaud, Growtoski, and Brook called for in their visionary writings and sought to enact in their actual theatre practice....In Friel the criticism of language is a theme, and he is interested in incorporating into his drama a more purely theatrical language of movement and sound, but there is no question of him seeking to exclude language or thinking that any alternative means of communication could ever entirely take the place of language. (217)

Most productively, Andrews might stress the connection with Brook rather than Artaud or Grotowski because Brook insisted, like Friel, on maintaining a connection to the audience, rather than an immersion in holy transcendence that became more and more a temple for the artists.[137]

Other critics, like Patrick Rafroidi, Heinz Kosok, and José Lanters, assess Friel's formal play using different terminology. Rafroidi suggests that the form is not as important as the focus: "If he is one of the major playwrights of our time–and as I read and re-read him, I feel more and more convinced he is–it is because he has been compelled to find a variety of scenic approaches –some new, some he may have borrowed from other genres or colleagues: Chekhov, O'Casey, O'Neill, Brecht, but it does not really matter–to convey his multiple vision" (11). Even when dismissing the importance of the source of Friels's borrowings, Rafroidi includes the Stanislavskian, Brechtian, and Irish traditions, but of course the form does matter too. It is through his multiple form that he conveys his multiple vision. Kosok states that "Friel, with the exception of *Faith Healer*, has retained his basic principle of selective stage realism, which makes the absence of a plot from such plays all the more noticeable" (168). He suggests that Friel disrupts his realistic staging by excluding action in favour of non-action or words. Kosok's interesting premiss, however, remains primarily at the level of text. Adding Stanislavskian identification to his term action and Brechtian detachment to his term non-action shows how this disruption works theatrically, and particularly how the same concerns and techniques continue even when the selective stage realism disappears in plays such as *Faith Healer* or *Molly Sweeney*. Lanters offers yet another alternative description of Friel's mixed forms, describing them as chaos theatre: "a dramatic form that places itself on the continuum between the philosophical and the aesthetic extremes of naturalism, with its faith in logic, rationality and orderly universal behaviour, and absurdism, with its insistence on alogic, irrationality and disorderly universal behaviour" ("Brian Friel's Uncertainty Principle" 162). According to Lanters, Friel's uses of naturalism align with order and his non-naturalistic disruptions with chaos, a conception that highlights the importance of flux in Friel's theatre. Yet his balance of naturalism and absurdism is not supported by a corresponding balance of theatrical forms. Friel is more devious than that. As Andrews notes, qualifying himself, Friel's disruptions come from, and go back to, the disrupted.

---

[137] Both Brook and Friel share an interest in adapting works by Oliver Sacks–into *The Man Who . . .* and *Molly Sweeney* respectively–who charts the mysteries of human perceptions and tries to communicate them. Friel would seem to accept this comparison, as in the Programme for *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* Peter Brook is twice cited, praising Friel's work in general and *Molly Sweeney* in particular.

> He recognizes that his theatre belongs to a different social context from primitive ritual in which the magic is taken for real. He knows his theatrical 'illusion' cannot compete with that. And so he aims for a dramatic synthesis in which music, space, performance and language all have a part to play; a

> synthesis too of Artaudian, Brechtian and traditional methods, as if in acknowledgement that life itself is an inseparable complex of impressions and judgements, illusion and disillusion. (*The Art of Brian Friel* 218)

Friel is uncertain only through his proximity to certainty, not-natural only through his proximity to naturalism. In order to reach beyond "Brechtian and traditional methods" Friel must first embrace them.

Additionally, Friel's use of the stage Irish tradition troubles Andrews' linking of Friel to Artaud and Grotowski. Andrews sees Friel following Grotowski, who is in turn following Artaud, to "the archetypal roots of drama" (214). In such a drama "the actor is a kind of shaman or high priest who tries to subjugate, and to fascinate, to charm away every possible rational defence which the spectator might cling to against the 'magic' of gestures and words" (214-15). Yet in the very play which includes a shaman figure, *Faith Healer*, we see that this gesture to magic, this performative verve is also undermined by its connection to the charlatan, the confidence trick, the stage Irishman.

A Crippled Canon

With his intermingled theatrical form, Friel does attempt a kind of Artaudian reach beyond, but, as with everything else in his work, he also undercuts it. In an effort to transcend the gap between stage and audience and effect meaningful communication, Friel melds Stanislavskian identification, Brechtian detachment, and Irish comic performativity, appealing individually and collectively, trying to reach the audience, and each member, emotionally and intellectually. Using these stitched together theatrical forms Friel can both attempt and necessarily fail, or at best only partially succeed, in his other attempts at transcendence. He tries to transcend the split self and achieve a wholeness shared with the audience in the move from *Philadelphia* to *Lughnasa*. With *Faith Healer*, he tries to transcend narrative and theatrical form and his own narrating role, to give the power of constructing reality to, or at least share it with, the audience across the footlights, only to qualify that move by focussing on the potential dangers of it with the crippling of *Molly*

Sweeney. He tries to transcend the ruptures, or splits, in the community, in the communal identity, by applying that shared narrative power to transcend "facts" in favour of enabling formative public myths and histories. In *Translations* and *The Communication Cord* he uses contextual communication in theatrical silence in such moments as the love scene in the former and the silent collapse at the end of the latter to transcend the stultification of failed linguistic communication between characters, between languages, between cultures, and between audience and stage. In all, he uses performativity to both create an appealing connection to the audience and to show the potential costs of a false connection. He uses it to deliberately undercut himself. Friel tries and fails deliberately, and that deliberate failing, and recognition of it, is his success, his qualified transcendence. Grand gestures, grand answers become small hints at a workable way forward however, necessarily, crippled.

Thus a notion of performativity which includes both the miraculous and the vulgar would seem to more appropriately describe Friel's transcendent gesture. Paradoxically, by doing so, by questioning an attempt to reach the irrational beyond the rational or chaos, Friel insists on, and indeed enhances the flux in his own work, through a doubting of it. To stress the importance of this performativity to Friel's work, I will once again quote, in full this time, Richard Tillinghast on Friel's theatre:

> A play is not a tissue of ideas, however, or even of words, but rather a spectacle, an experience. Leaving a Brian Friel play, looking for a taxi or hurrying to the pub before closing time, one is less likely to feel depressed by the puritanical repressiveness of small-town Ireland than heartened by an impression of the human spirit asserting itself in the face of impediments: [for example] Gar's mordant asides; the risky improvisations of Skinner, who, just before stepping outside into Guildhall Square in Derry, where he will be slaughtered by automatic weapons fire from British troops, signs himself in the visitor's book in the mayor's office: 'Freeman of the City.' And remembering *Lughnasa*, one smiles, thinking of the play's most celebrated (and, significantly, almost wordless) scene, where the Mundy

> sisters, inspired by music from their "voodoo" radio, break into spontaneous dance, a pure expression of defiance and transcendence. (41)

Each time a play transcends, it does so against a backdrop in need of transcendence. It does so with performative verve, but a verve that may ultimately be empty. The dance of defiance may seem momentarily triumphant and whole, but it is really gasping and partial. It is a crippled transcendence.

Friel's work is pervaded by cripples. Marilyn Throne wrote her article "The Disintegration of Authority" on all the ways, literally and figuratively, that his characters are crippled by their Irish heritage and tradition, a tradition itself that includes the emphasis on cripples so prevalent in Beckett, Synge, Yeats and others. In his latest play, all the characters are crippled in some way: most obviously Bridget's and David's mental illness, but also Daisy's alcoholism, Tom's writer's block, Garret and Grainne's crumbling relationship, Jack's kleptomania, and Maggie's arthritis. As Lanters says, "Sickness, madness, isolation, depression, kleptomania and alcoholism dominate the conversation: the forces of disintegration are about to prevail" ("Brian Friel's Uncertainty Principle" 167). Friel even says, in his diary on the play, that crippling was one of the initial key images of the play: "Hanging on desperately to the one, wan, casual, insubstantial, unwilling idea. An artist -- in a wheelchair?" (4 March 1995, 166) Richard Pine described Hugh O'Neill's apology at the end of *Making History* as Friel's admission of his own crippled intentions: "These words express the reluctant side of Friel's work to date: the admission of a broken, rather than a triumphant translator, or diviner" (Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* 212). But the brokenness is the triumph, the only possible translation.

Friel has attempted those translations theatrically through his particular investigations of "Irishness" and the Irish situation by revising language, identity and myth, and space. Kearney, Pine, Andrews and many others have examined Friel's preoccupations with verbal language, but Friel has also been interested in moving beyond to a theatrical language, Artaud's half-gesture, half thought, that might hint at possibilities beyond linguistic stagnation. In his most recent "Sporadic Diary," kept while writing *Give Me*, Friel noted his excitement at discovering a

> God of Silence!...'He is represented as having one of his fingers on his mouth, and hence he is called the god of silence and intimates that the mysteries of philosophy and religion ought never to be revealed to the people...[sic] placed by the Romans at the entrance of their temples.'
>
> Maybe at the entrance to the theatres?
>
> Should I build a shrine to him here? (29 January 1996, 170)

In the play he certainly seems to have built the shrine through the character of Bridget, who is both a repository of the unsaid and the conduit to speech. Her silence elicits speech from others and is, ultimately, its own speech beyond those words. And his theatre in general certainly worships this silence: silence moved from its place as the disabling abyss in *Philadelphia* to a place of enabling paradise in *Lughnasa*; it served as the realm of the unsayable which put pressure on the audience to connect the narratives in *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*; its covering by competing discourses was revealed as false in *Freedom of the City* while it contained the major events of the narratives in the disruptive gap of *Making History*; it embodied the true yet mysterious translation of the lovers' communication in *Translations* and the potentially devastating power of that connection in *The Communication Cord*.

In terms of identity and myth, Friel shows his constructions of individuals and communities as performance (f)acts. He is particularly interested in duality and the overlap of individual/communal identity, which he shows as springing from communal and individual myths, and which he (re)stages. Tom's verbal constructions of Bridget's identity next to her silent signifying body, illustrate such mythical constructions of identity in *Give Me*. Both *Philadelphia* and *Lughnasa* show the fissures in identity through splits in the main character and the performance space. Frank Hardy in *Faith Healer* and Dr. Rice in *Molly Sweeney* remind the audience that they both are, and perform, themselves. *Freedom of the City* and *Making History* recreate historical figures and situations using imagined individual performances to alter preconceived notions of those situations or identities. Further, the plays illustrate how identity can come from "donning the robes" or the accents of power. *Making History* also subtly repeats the splits of *Philadelphia* and *Lughnasa* by portraying two Hughs, allowing two views of constructions of identity and, at times, intentionally confusing them. Finally, the deliberate performativity in *Translations* and *The Communication Cord*, and indeed the reenacting performance of the former play in the latter and the call to the earlier Irish theatrical tradition, shows identity and shows it as performed. Even the name of the location of most of Friel's plays both asserts an identity and shows its construction, a construction which Friel foregrounds by having the name explained or translated in one of his early plays: "You know Baile Beag – Small Town" (*Philadelphia* 78). It is both generic and specific, individual and communal, authentic and constructed.

Space is obviously a primary concern in a partitioned land. Friel explores the possibilities of finding new locations, at least for dialogue, in his many split and many fluid performance spaces, showing, again and again, discourse contesting for space. In *Philadelphia* the private and public worlds of the bedroom and the kitchen ultimately defeat the fluid third space of the play, ending the play with division and stagnation. *Lughnasa* reverses that early conception, showing fluid space conquering the fixed, suggesting room for movement beyond the set borders. *Translations* and *The Communication Cord* both take place in one location, but both also hint at another, perhaps dangerous but also promising, space beyond linguistic borders: the more fluid place of non-verbal love in the former and the space cleared by the destruction of the static space by non-verbal love in the latter. *Freedom of the City* shows contestations for space between the levels of discourse, while *Making History* reveals the power of the off stage space of the gap to define the on stage space of the play. By doing so it suggests the importance of narrative or representational control of space (not to mention identity, myth, history, and language). Even in the more austere spaces of *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney* the discourses compete with one another, each claiming the space for itself and each being rejected by the others. In the earlier play, the contestations take place in the audience, whose members compare and assess the individual claims of the characters, but the physical memory of the other characters, just like their narrative memory, is always present. Friel makes that contestation more explicit in *Molly Sweeney* when he places all three performers on stage together, yet believing themselves alone. They tell their stories as individuals, but none is complete without the testimony of the others. In *Give Me Your Answer, Do!*, Friel again places two discourses, two spaces, the Bridget frame and the Daisy centre, in competition with each other, balancing, intruding, and, eventually, merging to some extent. Friel's search for an "artistic fifth province" has certainly been staged. And this staging has been a place for slippage in notions of language, identity, myth, and history.

Living (Without) Quarters

This stage provides a space of slippage for creating, or at least attempting to create, Robins' "placed identities for placeless times." Following Homi K. Bhaba, Joanne Tompkins, in her article "Breaching the Body's Boundaries: Abjected Subject Positions in Postcolonial Drama," explores Friel's *Lughnasa*, among other plays, for the potential productivity of constructing postcolonial identities on the borders of repression: "'the lack which the colonial subject had to experience in relation to the metropolis...could be turned into a space of subversion, liberation, and agency.' Such subversion enables Bhaba to read the colonized subject as pushing, crossing, and dismantling the boundaries that the colonizer's discursive power has erected" (Tompkins 503). Tompkins then uses the pyschoanalytic concept of the abject "to interrogate the border-crossing phenomenon that Bhaba has developed to question the ease with which the ideal colonized subjects are able to pass from one sphere or state to another" (503). She goes on to explore the potential for the multiple-casting of several actors to play one role in order to show fractures in identity and memory, illustrating multiple subject-positions and the difficulty of moving between those positions. Both Bhaba, and Tompkins while questioning him, emphasize the importance of creating representational room along the borders for investigations and recreations of identity. Elmer Andrews suggests that such space exists on the borders of competing discourses in Friel: "Friel...operates at the limits or points of intersection of various discourses...and, while demonstrating the impossibility of producing a totalising discourse, is concerned with exploring new positions or spaces that may be occupied in the interstices of the existing discourses" (*The Art of Brian Friel* 64). Friel's plays in performance provide a physical border space for discourse and identity beyond the page. On his stage, the characters, and through them the audience, experience the productivity and difficulty of transgression, of crossing the borders, of living in the margins. In this space, or from this space, negotiations can be made between fractured and authentic views of living and places to live.

In his *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama*, F.C. McGrath dismisses *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* because "plot, theme, and characterization in this recent play are not well-integrated" (248). Curiously, in a study devoted to the productivity, and inevitability, of the multiple, divergent, competing, and fractured discourses of postmodernism and postcolonialism, McGrath castigates Friel for a lack of wholeness, of completion, of singularity. Friel's formal play might explain this seeming contradiction. Friel's most successful plays commercially have been what I have called the three "Irish" plays: *Philadelphia*, *Translations*, and *Lughnasa*. The success of these plays has stemmed from the strength of the emotional identification between audience and stage, from a Stanislavskian wholeness or integration of plot, theme, and character, and from an exuberant performativity. But that success has come at a cost. Audiences can embrace (and have embraced) the performative nostalgia of the plays rather than seeing them in tandem with the bleak disruptions of that nostalgia. In plays like *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* Friel insists on making that cost clear even if the form is not always easily pleasing.

The Verdict?

Assuming of course I'm right. In their 1970 conversation on "The Future of Irish Drama," Hugh Leonard said to Friel and John B. Keane, "it is the attitude of critics which decide whether...you are going to go down in the textbooks as a playwright, as part of the theatre of the twentieth century" (14). Leonard's Pierre Bourdieu-like comments on the importance of the critics (reviewers and academics) perhaps help explain Friel's ambivalent attitude toward academics and judgement.[138] Friel's latest play, as Pine tells us, was inspired by the prospect of academic judgement of his papers, his canon. Friel rejected the academic, but then "put the 'Friel Canon'" (Pine, "What Is a Writer?": programme note for *Give Me*) into the play, exposing it for his own and our judgement. Friel even included the academic in the play as David Knight, but as with several academics included in his other work, like Dodds the sociologist in *Freedom* and Tom Hoffnung the researcher in *Aristocrats*, he exposes David's profound lack of judgement. David mistakenly identifies the music twice in the play and, the second time, refuses correction (17, 62). He, and possibly we in the audience, cannot identify well-known quotations until Tom tells him, and us, the source (19-20). Friel explained to Richard Pine the strongly autobiographical desire for, and rejection of, judgement in the play:

> The play...is the play of an elderly/old writer who has got to that selfish, boring, but nevertheless painful, stage where he tells himself he wants an overall assessment of what he has done–a judgement, a final verdict. He feels uncertainty can't be kept at bay any longer. In this fiction one aspect of that old writer (Garret) gets that public assessment–and is astute enough to know how worthless it is. The other aspect of that old writer (Tom), although he desperately wants that assessment...finally turns his back on it on Daisy's insistence and chooses Necessary Uncertainty instead....And of course now that I offer this blunt summary I must withdraw it instantly. (qtd. in Pine, "Love" 180)

In some ways the play is a kind of serious joke, moving from the writer, Friel, asking the academic for an answer to the academic saying, as Pine does in his letter to Friel ("Love" 179-80), "Friel, Friel, give me your answer, do!" But, rather than answers, Friel provides questions: the question of the title of the play; the questions that Pine notes, and asks, in both his article on the play ("Love" 179-80, 182) and his programme note for the play; the questions that saturate Friel's "Sporadic Diary" on the play (166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 172); and even a question of his own stage direction in the play (79). In some senses, Friel is asking his own work, "Why Canon? Why Arid Canon?" (*Philadelphia* 88) and asking himself to translate. Assessing his writing process after completing *Translations*, Friel said,

---

[138] In the Irish context, such assessment can be even more troubling as works of art receive not just symbolic judgement, symbolic capital, but judgement on their "Irishness," which allots them a nationalistic capital whether they want it or not.

> The task of writing the play, the actual job of putting the pattern together, itself generates belief in the pattern....The process seems trivial and transient because the patterns are so impermanent. But is there another way?...All art is a diary of evolution; markings that seemed true of and for their time; adjustments in stance and disposition; opening to what seemed the persistence of the moment. Map-makings. ("Extracts *Translations*" 5 November 1979, 61)

Throughout his work, Friel has been making and then questioning patterns of language, memory, myth, identity, and space.

When I began this doctoral project, this map-making, I believed that I was of Irish-Catholic descent feeling some sympathy for the Nationalist cause in Ireland, and a real desire to explore avenues of communication that offer a way out of the political quagmire of Northern Ireland. Halfway through, in looking at emigration patterns and then talking to family members, I discovered that I am primarily descended from the Irish Protestants from the North and that I had a great grandfather who was an Orangeman who came to Canada to fight with the United Empire Loyalists against the United States in the War of 1812. This discovery left me bemused and then in greater sympathy with Friel's exploration of personal and public memory. He accepts memory that enables, whether or not it is completely factually true. He explores the "truth" of facts and feelings and the need to be able to accept or reject both, to straddle the border, combining them to empower identity and the possibilities of movement in the present. As an interpreter, an academic, I have been trying and inevitably failing to communicate, only hoping through a combination of disciplinary approaches to accomplish some sort of crippled transcendence of my own, a crippled transcendence that would be manifest in any attempt to stage the works which are both solid and ethereal at once.

WORKS CITED

At First Sight. Dir. Irwin Winkler. MGM, 1999.

"Field Day: *The Communication Cord*." Group Rev. of *The Communication Cord*, dir. Joe Dowling. Field Day Theatre. 1982 Irish Tour. *Theatre Ireland* 2 (Jan/May1983): 66-69.

"The Future of Irish Drama: A Discussion Between Fergus Linehan, Hugh Leonard, John B. Keane, and Brian Friel." *Irish Times* 12 Feb. 1970: 14.

"Programme for *Give Me Your Answer, Do!*" Dublin: The Abbey Theatre, 1997.

"Programme for *Making History*." Derry: Field Day, 1988.

"Programme for *The Freedom of the City*." London: Royal Court Theatre, 1973.

Achilles, Jochen. "'Homesick for Abroad': The Transition From National to Cultural Identity in Contemporary Irish Drama." *Modern Drama* 38.4 (1995): 435-49.

---. "Intercultural Relations in Brian Friel's Works." *The Internationalism of Irish Literature and Drama*. Ed. Joseph McMinn. Irish Literary Studies 41. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1992. 3-15.

Agnew, Paddy. "Talking to Ourselves: Brien Friel Talks to Paddy Agnew." *Magill* 4.3 (1980): 59-61.

Ahrens, Ruedigger. "National Myths and Stereotypes in Modern Irish Drama: Sean O'Casey, Brendan Behan, Brian Friel." *Fu Jen Studies* 21 (1988): 89-110.

Andrews, Elmer. *The Art of Brian Friel: Neither Reality nor Dreams*. New York: St. Martin's, 1995.

---. "The Fifth Province." *The Achievement of Brian Friel*. Ed. Alan J. Peacock. Ulster Editions and Monographs 4. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1993. 29-48.

Andrews, J. H. "Notes for a Future Edition of Brian Friel's *Translations*." *Irish Review* 13 (1992): 93-106.

Arkins, Brian. "The Role of Greek and Latin in Friel's *Translations*." *Colby Quarterly* 27.4 (1991): 202-09.

Barry, Kevin, Brian Friel, and J. H. Andrews. "*Translations* and *A Paper Landscape*: Between Fiction and History." *The Crane Bag* 7.2 (1983): 118-24.

Bell, Sam Hanna. *The Theatre in Ulster*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972.

Bertha, Csilla. "Tragedies of National Fate: A Comparison Between Brian Friel's *Translations* and Its Hungarian Counterpart, Andras Suto's *A Szuzai Menyegzo*." *Irish University Review* 17.2 (1987): 207-22.

Binnie, Eric. "Brecht and Friel: Some Irish Parallels." *Modern Drama* 31.3 (1988): 365-70.

Birker, Klaus. "The Relationship Between the Stage and the Audience in Brian Friel's 'The Freedom of the City'." *The Irish Writer and the City*. Ed. Maurice Harmon. Irish Literary Studies 18. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1984. 153-58.

Blake, Ann. "Brian Friel and Irish Theatre." *Australasian Drama Studies* 10 (1987): 107-17.

Boland, Eavan. "Brian Friel: Derry's Playwright." *Hibernia* 16 Feb. 1973: 18.

---. "The Northern Writer's Crisis of Conscience." *The Irish Times* 12, 13, 14 Aug. 1970: 12,12,12.

Boltwood. Scott. "'Swapping Stories About Apollo and Cuchulainn': Brian Friel and the De-Gaelicizing of Ireland." *Modern Drama* 41.4 (1998): 573-83.

Bordinat, Phillip. "Tragedy Through Comedy in Plays by Brendan Behan and Brian Friel." *West Virginia University Philological Papers* 29 (1983): 84-91.

Bradley, Anthony. "Brian Friel's *Translations*." *An Gael* 3.1 (1985): 6-9.

Brown, Terence. "'Have We a Context?': Transition, Self and Society in the Theatre of Brian Friel." *The Achievement of Brian Friel*. Ed. Alan J. Peacock. Ulster Editions and Monographs 4. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1993. 190-201.

Burke, Patrick. "'As If Language No Longer Existed': Non-Verbal Theatricality in the Plays of Brian Friel." *Brian Friel: A Casebook*. Ed. William Kerwin. Casebooks on Modern Dramatists 20. New York: Garland, 1997. 13-22.

---. "'Both Heard and Imagined': Music As Structuring Principle in the Plays of Brian Friel." *A Small Nation's Contribution to the World: Essays on Anglo-Irish Literature and Language*. Eds. Donald E. Morse, Bertha Csilla, and Istvan. Pallfy. Irish Literary Studies 45. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1993. 43-52.

Canby, Vincent. "Linking Language and Ethnic Identity in Friel Territory." Rev. of *Translations*, dir. Howard Davies. Plymouth Theatre, New York. *New York Times* 20 Mar. 1995: B1, 2.

Canby, Vincent. "Seeing, in Brian Friel's Ballybeg." Rev. of *Molly Sweeney*, dir. Brian Friel. Laura Pels Theater, New York. *New York Times* 8 Jan. 1996: 17, 23.

Capecchi, Elena. "A Voice From Donegal: Brian Friel and *Dancing at Lughnasa*." *The Classical World and the Mediterranean*. Eds. Giuseppe Serpillo and Donatella Badin. Cagliari, Italy: Tema, 1996. 279-83.

Carty, Ciaran. "Finding a Voice in a Language Not Our Own." *Sunday Independent* 5 Oct.1980: 16.

Clarity, James F. "Arts Abroad: a Time for Calm in Ireland and a New View of Friel." *New York Times* 9 June 1999: E2.

Clutterbuck, Catriona. "*Lughnasa* After *Easter*: Treatments of Narrative Imperialism in Friel and Devlin." *Irish University Review* 29.1 (1999): 101-18.

Coakley, James. "Chekov in Ireland: Brief Notes on Friel's 'Philadelphia'." *Comparative Drama* 7 (1973): 191-97.

Comiskey, Ray. "Rehearsing Friel's New Farce." *The Irish Times* 14 Sept. 1982: 8.

Connolly, Sean. "Dreaming History: Brian Friel's 'Translations'." *Theatre Ireland* 13 (1987): 42-44.

---. "Translating History: Brian Friel and the Irish Past." *The Achievement of Brian Friel*. Ed. Alan J. Peacock. Ulster Editions and Monographs 4. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1993. 149-63.

Corcoran, Neil. "The Penalties of Retrospect: Continuities in Brian Friel." *The Achievement of Brian Friel*. Ed. Alan J. Peacock. Ulster Editions and Monographs 4. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1993. 14-28.

Coveney, Michael. "Review: *The Freedom of the City*." Rev. of *The Freedom of the* City, dir. Albert Finney. Royal Court Theatre, London. Plays *and Players* 20.1 (1973): 48-9.

Craig, Patricia. "Babel in Ballybeg." Rev. of *Translations*. Donmar Warehouse, London. *Times Literary Supplement* 4709 (2 July 1993): 20.

Cullingford, Elizabeth Butler. "British Romans and Irish Carthaginians: Anticolonial Metaphor in Heaney, Friel, and McGuinness." *PMLA* 3.2 (1996): 222-39.

Dantanus, Ulf. *Brian Friel: A Study*. London: Faber and Faber, 1988.

---. *Brian Friel: The Growth of an Irish Dramatist*. Goteborg: Acta Universitatibus Gothoburgensis, 1985.

---. "Time for a New Irish Playwright." *Moderna Sprak* 71 (1977): 37-47.

Davis, Jessica Milner. *Farce*. The Critical Idiom 39. Bristol: Methuen, 1978.

Deane, Seamus. "Brian Friel: the Double Stage." *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980*. London: Faber and Faber, 1985. 166-73.

---, Ed. *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*. Derry: Field Day Theatre Co., 1991.

---. "Heroic Styles: the Tradition of an Idea." *A Field Day Pamphlet*. Vol. no. 4. Derry: Field Day Theatre Co., 1984. 5-18.

---. "Introduction." *Selected Plays of Brian Friel*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984. 11-22.

---. "The Name of the Game." *The Achievement of Brian Friel*. Ed. Alan J. Peacock. Ulster Editions and Monographs 4. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1993. 103-12.

DeVinney, Karen. "Monologue As Dramatic Action in Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* and *Molly Sweeney*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 45.1 (1999): 110-19.

Diamond, Elin. "(In)Visible Bodies in Churchill's Theatre." *Theatre Journal* 40.2 (1988): 189-203.

Dixon, Stephen. "Mapping Cultural Imperialism." *The Guardian* 27 Sept. 1980: 11.

Dowling, Joe. "One of This Century's Truly Great Thespians." *Irish Times on the Web* 19 July 1999. Online. Internet. 22 July 1999.

---. "Staging Friel." *The Achievement of Brian Friel*. Ed. Alan J. Peacock. Ulster Editions and Monographs 4. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1993. 178-89.

Duncan, Dawn. "Pushing the Postcolonial Boundaries: Freeing the Irish Voice in Brian Friel's *Translations*." *Studies in the Plays of Brian Friel*. Dawn Duncan, John C. Countryman, and Susan C. Harris. Ft. Lauderdale, Florida: Nova Southeastern University, Dept. of Liberal Arts, 1994. 1-10.

Eder, Richard. "Drama: Friel's *Faith Healer*." Rev. of *Faith Healer*, dir. José Quintero. Longacre Theater, New York. *New York Times* 6 Apr. 1979: C3.

Etherton, Michael. *Contemporary Irish Dramatists*. MacMillan Modern Dramatists. London: MacMillan, 1989.

Fagan, Kieran. "Bord Failte Promotes *Lughnasa*." *Irish Times on the Web* 10 Nov. 1998: Online. Internet. 8 Jan. 1999

---. "'Friel Country' to Emulate Killarney, McDaid Says." *Irish Times* 11 Nov. 1998: Online. Internet. 8 Jan. 1999.

Farleigh, John. "After *Philadelphia*." *Brian Friel in Conversation*. Ed. Paul Delaney. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 47-50.

Farrelly, James P., and Mark C. Farrelly. "Ireland Facing the Void: the Emergence of Meaninglessness in the Works of Brian Friel." *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 24.1 (1988): 105-14.

Farren, Roman. "Broadway? Who Cares!" *Brian Friel in Conversation*. Ed. Paul Delaney. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 123-26.

Feingold, Michael. "Altered Cases: *The Hope Zone* and *Molly Sweeney*." Rev. of *Molly Sweeney*, dir. Brian Friel. Laura Pels Theater, New York. *Village Voice* 41.3 (1996): 61.

Ferris, Kathleen. "Brian Friel's Uses of Laughter." *Brian Friel: A Casebook*. Ed. William Kerwin. Casebooks on Modern Dramatists 20. New York: Garland, 1997. 117-34.

Finnegan, Laurence. "In Interview With Laurence Finnegan." *Brian Friel Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999*. Ed. Christopher Murray. London: Faber and Faber, 1999. 123-34.

Fitzgerald-Hoyt, Mary. "Brian Friel and "Making History"." *Notes on Modern Irish Literature* 10 (1998): 26-29.

FitzGibbon, Gerald. "Garnering the Facts: Unreliable Narrators in Some Plays of Brian Friel." *Critical Approaches to Anglo-Irish Literature*. Eds. Michael Allen and Angela Wilcox. Irish Literary Studies 29. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1989. 53-62.

Franklin, Nancy. "One Man's Madness." Rev. of *Molly Sweeney*, dir. Brian Friel. Laura Pels Theater, New York. *New Yorker* 71.46 (1996): 94-5.

Friel, Brian. "American Welcome." Louisville, Kentucky: Actor's Theatre, 1980.

---. " *Aristocrats. Selected Plays of Brian Friel*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984. 247-326.

---. *The Communication Cord*. Dublin: Gallery Press, 1983.

---. " *Crystal and Fox. Crystal and Fox and The Mundy Scheme*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1970.

---. *Dancing at Lughnasa*. London: Faber and Faber, 1990.

---. *The Enemy Within*. Dublin: Gallery Press, 1979.

---. "Extracts From a Sporadic Diary (*Aristocrats*)." *The Writers: A Sense of Ireland*. Eds.

Andrew Carpenter and Peter Fallon. Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1980. 38-43.

---. "Extracts From a Sporadic Diary (*Give Me Your Answer, Do!*)." *Brian Friel: Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999*. Ed. Christopher Murray. London: Faber and Faber, 1999. 166-72.

---. "Extracts From a Sporadic Diary (*Molly Sweeney*)." *Brian Friel: Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999*. Ed. Christopher Murray. London: Faber and Faber, 1999. 153-65.

---. "Extracts From a Sporadic Diary (*Translations*)." *Ireland and the Arts*. Ed. Tim Pat Coogan. London: Namara Press, 1983. 56-61.

---. *Faith Healer*. *Selected Plays of Brian Friel*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984. 327-76.

---. *Fathers and Sons: After the Novel by Ivan Turgenev*. London: Faber and Faber, 1987.

---. *The Freedom of the City*. *Selected Plays of Brian Friel*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984. 101-169.

---. *The Gentle Island*. London: Davis-Poynter, 1973.

---. *Give Me Your Answer, Do!* Dublin: Gallery Press, 1997.

---. *Living Quarters*. *Selected Plays of Brian Friel*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984. 171-246.

---. *Lovers*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1968.

---. *The Loves of Cass McGuire*. Dublin: Gallery Press, 1984.

---. *Making History*. London: Faber and Faber, 1989.

---. *Molly Sweeney*. London: Penguin, 1994.

---. *The Mundy Scheme*. *Crystal and Fox and The Mundy Scheme*. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1970.

---. "An Observer in Minneapolis." *Brian Friel: In Conversation*. Ed. Paul. Delaney. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 35-9.

---. *Philadelphia Here I Come*. *Selected Plays of Brian Friel*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984. 23-99.

---. "Plays Peasant and Unpeasant." *Times Literary Supplement* 3655 (17 Mar. 1972): 305-6.

---. "Self-Portrait." *Aquarius* 3 (1972): 17-22.

---. "Seven Notes From a Festival Programme." *Brian Friel: Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999*. Ed. Christopher Murray. London: Faber and Faber, 1999. 173-80.

---. "The Theatre of Hope and Despair." *Everyman* 1 (1968): 17-22.

—. *Three Sisters By Anton Chekhov: A Translation*. Dublin: Gallery books, 1981.

---. *Translations*. London: Faber and Faber, 1981.

---. *Uncle Vanya: A Version of the Play by Anton Chekhov*. Dublin: Gallery Press, 1998.

---. *Volunteers*. London: Faber and Faber, 1979.

---. *Wonderful Tennessee*. London: Samuel French, 1993.

Friel, Brian and Thomas Murphy. "Two Playwrights With a Single Theme." *A Paler Shade of Green*. Des Smith, Gus Hickey. London: Leslie Frewin, 1972. 220-27.

Funke, Lewis. "Interview With Brian Friel." *Brian Friel in Conversation*. Ed. Paul Delaney. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 51-71.

Fusco, Cassandra. "The Dancer or the Dance?: A Critical Analysis of Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*." *Etudes Irlandaises* 21.1 (1996): 109-26.

Garebian, Keith. "Commentary: The 1982 Stratford Festival." Rev. of *Translations*, dir. Guy Sprung. Stratford Festival. Stratford, Canada. *Journal of Canadian Studies* 17.4 (1982): 102-11.

Gillespie, Elgy. "The Saturday Interview: Brian Friel." *Irish Times* 5 Sept. 1981: Weekend 6.

Gleitman, Claire. "Negotiating History, Negotiating Myth: Friel Among His Contemporaries." *Brian Friel: A Casebook*. Ed. William Kerwin. Casebooks on Modern Dramatists 20. New York: Garland, 1997. 227-41.

Grene, Nicholas. "Distancing Drama: Sean O'Casey to Brian Friel." *Irish Writers and the Theatre*. Ed. Masaru Sekine. Irish Literary Studies 23. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1986. 47-70.

---. "Friel and Transparency." *Irish University Review* 29.1 (1999): 136-44.

---. "In a Dark Time." Rev. of *Molly Sweeney*, by Brian Friel. *Irish Literary Supplement*.(Spring 1995): 25.

---. "Truth and Indeterminacy in Brian Friel." *Studies on the Contemporary Irish Theatre*. Ed. Jaqueline Genet and Elisabeth Hellegouarch. Caen: PU de Caen, 1991. 9-20.

Gussow, Mel. "From Ballybeg to Broadway." *New York Times Magazine* 29 Sept. 1991: 30, 55-61.

Hampton, Wilborn. "Theater Review: They Sought Change and Found Death." Rev. *The Freedom of the City*, dir. Conall Morrison. Abbey Theatre. Lincoln Center Festival, New York. *New York Times* 10 July 1999: B7, 13.

Harrington, John P. *The Irish Play on the New York Stage, 1874-1966*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997.

Harris, Claudia W. "The Engendered Space: Performing Friel's Women From Cass McGuire to Molly Sweeney." *Brian Friel: A Casebook*. Ed. William Kerwin. Casebooks on Modern Dramatists 20. New York: Garland, 1997. 43-76.

Harris, Susan C. "Blow the Witches Out: Gender Construction and the Subversion of Nationalism in Yeats's *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* and *On Baile's Strand* ." *Modern Drama* 29.3 (Fall1996): 475-89.

---. "Don the Robes and Taste Real Power: the Sacred, the Profane, and the Power of Ritual in Two Plays by Brian Friel." *Studies in the Plays of Brian Friel*. Dawn Duncan, John C. Countryman, and Susan C. Harris. Ft. Lauderdale, Florida: Nova Southeastern University, Dept. of Liberal Arts, 1994. 24-38.

Heaney, Seamus. "For Liberation: Brian Friel and the Use of Memory." *The Achievement of Brian Friel*. Ed. Alan J. Peacock. Ulster Editions and Monographs 4. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1993. 229-40.

Hills, Ian. "Mapping Cultural Imperialism." Rev. of *Translations*. Field Day Theatre. Derry. *The Guardian* 27 Sept. 1980: 11.

Hogan, Robert. *"Since O'Casey" and Other Essays*. Irish Literary Studies 15. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1983.

Huber, Werner. "Irish Vs. English: Brian Friel's *Making History*." *Anglistik Und Enlischunterricht* 41 (1990): 165-75.

Hughes, George. "Ghosts and Ritual in Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*." *Irish University Review* 24.2 (1994): 175-85.

Jefferson, Margo. "Is Brian Friel's Ode to Molly Truly a Play?" Rev. of *Molly Sweeney*, dir. Brian Friel. Laura Pels Theater, New York. *New York Times* 21 Jan. 1996: H4, 26.

Jeffery, Keith. "Deliberate Disinformation." Rev. of *The Communication Cord*, dir. Joe Dowling. Field Day Theatre. Grand Opera House, Belfast. *Times Literary Supplement* 4150 (15 Oct. 1982): 1130.

Jent, William. "Supranational Civics: Poverty and the Politics of Representation in Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City*." *Modern Drama* 37.4 (1994): 568-87.

Johnston, Denis. "Brian Friel and Modern Irish Drama." *Hibernia* 3 July 1975: 22.

Kauffmann, Stanley. "*Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Arrives." Rev. of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, dir. Hilton Edwards. Helen Hayes Theater, New York. *New York Times* 17 Feb. 1966: 28.

Kavanagh, Julie. "Friel at Last." *Vanity Fair* (October 1991): 128, 130, 134, 138.

Kearney, Richard. "Friel and the Politics of Language Play." *Massachusetts Review* 28.3 (1987): 510-15.

---. "Language Play: Brian Friel and Ireland's Verbal Theatre." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 72.285 (1983): 20-56.

Kelly, Colm. "Homecomings and Diversions: Cultural Nationalism and the Recent Drama of Brian Friel." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 76 (1987): 452-62.

Keogh, Antoin. *Dion Boucicault: An Irish Playwright*. Dublin: Saor-Ollscoil Press, 1990.

Kerr, Walter. "One Plus One Equals One." Rev. of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, dir. Hilton Edwards. Helen Hayes Theater, New York. *Thirty Plays Hath November: Pain and Pleasure in the Contemporary Theater*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1970. 113-17.

Kiberd, Declan. "Brian Friel's 'Faith Healer'." *Irish Writers and Society at Large*. Ed. Masaru Sekine. Irish Literary Studies 22. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1985. 106-21.

Kiberd, Declan. *Inventing Ireland*. London: Vintage, 1996.

Kilroy, Thomas. *The O'Neill*. Loughcrew, Ireland: Gallery Books, 1995.

Kilroy, Thomas. "Theatrical Text and Literary Text." *The Achievement of Brian Friel*. Ed. Alan J. Peacock. Ulster Editions and Monographs 4. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1993. 91-102.

Kosok, Heinz. "Words *Versus* Action in the Plays of Brian Friel." *Word and Action in Drama: Studies in Honour of Hans-Jurgen Diller on the Occasion of His 60th Birthday*. Eds. Gunter Ahrends, et al. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher verlag trier, 1994.

157-69.

Krause, David. "The Failed Words of Brian Friel." *Modern Drama* 40 (1997): 359-73.

Lahr, John. "Brian Friel's Blind Faith." Rev. of *Molly Sweeney*, dir. Brian Friel. Gate Theatre. Dublin. *The New Yorker* 17 Oct. 1994: 107-10.

---. "In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Due on Broadway This Month, Brian Friel Celebrates Life's Pagan Joys." *Brian Friel in Conversation*. Ed. Paul Delaney. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 213-17.

Lanters, Jose. "Brian Friel's Uncertainty Principle." *Irish University Review* 29.1 (1999): 162-75.

Lanters, Jose. "Gender and Identity in Brian Friel's *Faith Healer* and Thomas Murphy's *The Gigli Concert*." *Irish University Review* 22.2 (1992): 278-90.

Leary, Daniel. "The Romanticism of Brian Friel." *Contemporary Irish Writing*. Eds. James D. Brophy and Raymond Porter. Boston: Twayne, 1983.

Lee, Josephine. "Linguistic Imperialism, the Early Abbey Theatre, and the *Translations* of Brian Friel." *Imperialism and Theatre: Essays on World Theatre, Drama and Performance*. Ed. J. Ellen Gainor. London: Routledge, 1995. 164-81.

Lehman, Elmar. "England's Ireland: An Analysis of Some Contemporary Plays." *Studies in Anglo-Irish Literature*. Ed. Heinz Kozok. Wuppertaler Schriftenreihe Literartur 19. Bonn: Bouvier, 1982. 431-38.

Lojek, Helen. "Brian Friel's Plays and George Steiner's Linguistics: Translating the Irish." *Contemporary Literature* 35.1 (1994): 83-99.

Longley, Edna. *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland*. Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1994.

---. *Poetry in the Wars*. Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1986.

Lyons, David. "Exiled From Blindness; Homeless in Sight." Rev. of *Molly Sweeney*, dir. Brian Friel. Laura Pels Theater, New York. *Wall Street Journal* 11 Jan. 1996: A12.

Maxwell, D. E. S. *Brian Friel*. Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1973.

---. *A Critical History of Modern Irish Drama: 1891-1980*. Cambridge: Cambridge unversity Press, 1984.

---. "Imagining the North: Violence and the Writers." *Eire-Ireland* 8 (1973): 91-107.

---. "Northern Ireland's Political Drama." *Modern Drama* 33.1 (1990): 1-14.

Maxwell, Desmond. "'Figures in a Peepshow': Friel and the Irish Dramatic Tradition." *The Achievement of Brian Friel*. Ed. Alan J. Peacock. Ulster Editions and Monographs 4. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1993. 49-68.

McGowan, Moray. "Truth, Politics and the Individual: Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City* and the Northern Ireland Conflict." *Literatur in Wittenschaft Und Unterricht* 12 (1979): 287-303.

McGrath, F. C. "Brian Friel and the Irish Art of Lying." *Brian Friel: A Casebook*. Ed. William Kerwin. Casebooks on Modern Dramatists 20. New York: Garland, 1997. 3-12.

---. "Brian Friel and the Politics of the Anglo-Irish Language." *Colby Quarterly* 26.4 (1990): 241-48.

---. *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama: Language, Illusion and Politics*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999.

---. "Introducing Ireland's Field Day." *Eire-Ireland* 23.4 (1988): 145-55.

---. "Irish Babel: Brian Friel's *Translations* and George Steiner's *After Babel*." *Comparative Drama* 23 (1989): 31-49.

---. "Language, Myth, and History in the Later Plays of Brian Friel." *Contemporary Literature* 30.4 (1989): 534-45.

McGuinness, Frank. "*Faith Healer*: All the Dead Voices." *Irish University Review* 29.1 (1999): 60-63.

McKeone, Gary. "Fact and Fiction." Rev. of *Making History*, dir. Simon Curtis. Field Day Theatre. Cottesloe Theatre, London. *Theatre Ireland* 17: 7-8.

McMullan, Anna. "'In Touch With Some Otherness': Gender, Authority and the Body in *Dancing at Lughnasa*." *Irish University Review* 29.1 (1999): 90-100.

McMullen, Kim. "Decolonizing Rosaleen: Some Feminist, Nationalist, and Postcolonialist Discourses in Irish Studies." *MMLA* 29.1 (1996): 32-45.

Meissner, Colin. "Words Between Worlds: the Irish Language, the English Army, and the Violence of Translation in Brian Friel's 'Translations'." *Colby Quarterly* 28.3 (1992): 164-74.

Murray, Christopher, Ed. *Brian Friel Essays, Diaries, Interviews: 1964-1999*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999.

Murray, Christopher. "Brian Friel's 'Making History' and the Problem of Historical Accuracy." *The Crows Behind the Plough: History and Violence in Anglo-Irish Poetry and Drama*. Ed. Geert Lernhout. Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 1991. 61-77.

Murray, Christopher. "Brian Friel's *Molly Sweeney* and Its Sources: a Postmodern Case History." *Etudes Irlandaises* 23.2 (1998): 81-98.

Murray, Christopher. "Friel and O'Casey Juxtaposed." *Irish University Review* 29.1 (1999): 16-29.

Murray, Christopher. "'Recording Tremors': Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* and the Uses of Tradition." *Brian Friel: A Casebook*. Ed. William Kerwin. Casebooks on Modern Dramatists 20. New York: Garland, 1997. 23-41.

Niel, Ruth. "Non-Realistic Techniques in the Plays of Brian Friel: The Debt to International Drama." *Literary Interrelations: Ireland, England, and the World*. Eds. Wolfgang Zach and Heinz Kozok. Vol. 2. Studies in English and Comparative Literature. Tubingen: Narr, 1987. 349-59.

Nowlan, David. "Arts Review: *The Freedom of the City*." Rev. of *The Freedom of the* City, dir. Conall Morrison. Abbey Theatre, Dublin. *Irish Times on the Web* 30 Apr. 1999. Online. Internet. 4 May 2000.

---. "Arts Reviews: *Making History* Peacock Theatre." Rev. of *Making History*, dir. Brian Brady. Peacock Theatre, Dublin. *Irish Times on the Web* 2 July 1999. Online. Internet. 4 May 2000.

O'Brien, George. *Brian Friel*. Boston: Twayne, 1990.

O'Brien Johnson, Toni, and David Cairns, eds. *Gender in Irish Writing*. Gender in Writing. Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1991.

O'Connor, Ulick. *Brian Friel: Crisis and Commitment–The Writer and Northern Ireland*. Dublin: Elo Publications, 1989.

O'Connor, Ulick. "Friel Takes Derry by Storm." *Brian Friel in Conversation*. Ed. Paul Delaney. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 158-60.

O'Faolain, Sean. *The Great O'Neill*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942.

O'Gorman, Farrell. "Irish Stage Identities in Friel's *Translations* and Stoppard's *Travesties*: Defenders of the Word in an Age of Linguistic Impoverishment." *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 24.2 (1988): 1-13.

O'Grady, Thomas B. "Insubstantial Fathers and Consubstantial Sons: A Note on Patrimony and Patricide in Friel and Leonard." *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 15.1 (1989):

71-79.

O'Toole, Fintan. "Barriers: *The Communication Cord.*" Rev. of *The Communication Cord*, dir. Joe Dowling. Field Day Theatre. Riverside Theatre, Coleraine. *In Dublin* 28 Oct. 1982: 52.

---. "The Man From God Knows Where." *In Dublin* 165 (1982): 20-23.

---. "Marking Time: From *Making Mistory* to *Dancing at Lughnasa.*" *The Achievement of Brian Friel*. Ed. Alan J. Peacock. Ulster Editions and Monographs 4. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1993. 202-14.

Onkey, Lauren. "The Woman As Nation in Brian Friel's *Translations.*" *Brian Friel: A Casebook*. Ed. William Kerwin. Casebooks on Modern Dramatists 20. New York: Garland, 1997. 159-74.

Peacock, Alan J. "Translating the Past: Friel, Greece and Rome." *The Achievement of Brian Friel*. Ed. Alan J. Peacock. Ulster Editions and Monographs 4. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1993. 113-33.

Peacock, Alan J., and Kathleen Devine. "'In Touch With Some Otherness': The Double Vision of Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa.*" *Etudes Irlandaises* 17.1 (1992): 113-27.

Pelletier, Martine. "Telling Stories and Making History: Brian Friel and Field Day." *Irish University Review* 24.2 (1994): 186-97.

Pelletier, Martine, and Perro De Jong. "'Whispering Private and Sacred Things': Field Day, Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* and Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy.*" *Etudes Irlandaises* 17.1 (1992): 129-45.

Pilkington, Lionel. "Theatre and Insurgency in Ireland." *Essays in Theatre* 12.2 (1994): 129-40.

Pine, Richard. "Brian Friel and Contemporary Irish Drama." *Colby Quarterly* 27.4 (1991): 190-201.

---. *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama*. London: Routledge, 1990.

---. "Love: Brian Friel's *Give Me Your Answer, Do!*" *Irish University Review* 29.1 (1999): 176-88.

---. "Yeats, Friel, and the Politics of Failure." *Yeats: An Annual of Critical and Textual Studies* 10 (1992): 154-71.

Pine, Richard, David Grant, and Derek West. "*Dancing at Lughnasa*: Richard Pine, David

Grant, and Derek West Write About Brian Friel's New Play for the Abbey." Group Rev. of *Dancing at* Lughnasa, dir. Patrick Mason. Abbey Theatre, Dublin. *Theatre Ireland* 22 (1990): 7-11.

Quilligan, Patrick. "Field Day's New Double Bill." *Brian Friel in Conversation*. Ed. Paul Delaney. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 192-4.

Rabey, David Ian. "The Bite of Exiled Love: Abjective Protagonists in Some Contemporary Anglo Irish Dramas." *Essays in Theatre* 13.1 (1994): 29-43.

---. *British and Irish Political Drama in the Twentieth Century: Implicating the Audience*. London: Macmillan, 1986.

Radin, Victoria. "Voice From Ireland: Victoria Radin Talks to Brian Friel." *Observer* 1 March 1981: 34.

Radio Telefís Éireann. "Brian Friel and Field Day." *Brian Friel in Conversation*. Ed. Paul Delaney. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 178-91.

Rafroidi, Patrick. "The Worlds of Brian Friel." *Perspectives of Irish Drama and Theatre*. Eds. Jaqueline Genet and Allen Cave. Irish Literary Studies. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1991. 107-14.

Regan, Stephen. "*Translations* by Brian Friel." *The English Review* (1995): 38-41.

Richards, David. "Now Starring in Dublin: a Poetic Friel Heroine." Rev. of *Molly Sweeney*, dir. Brian Friel. Gate Theatre. Dublin. *New York Times* 7 Sept. 1994: C13, 16.

Richards, Shaun. "The Changing Landscape of Fact: English As 'Necessary Sin' in Contemporary Irish Literature." *New Comparison* 7 (1989): 88-98.

---. "Placed Identities for Placeless Times: Brian Friel and Postcolonial Criticism." *Irish University Review* 29.1 (1999): 55-68.

Richtarik, Marilynn J. *Acting Between the Lines:The Field Day Theatre Company and Irish Cultural Politics, 1980-1984*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Ridley, Jasper. "A National Hero: Brian Friel *Making History*." Rev. of *Making History*, dir. Simon Curtis. Field Day Theatre. Cottesloe Theatre, London. *Times Literary Supplement* 4,472 (16-22 Dec. 1988): 1397.

Robbins, Joan E. "Conjuring the Life of the Spirit in the Plays of Brian Friel." *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 18.2 (1992): 75-87.

Robinson, Paul N. "Brian Friel's 'Faith Healer': An Irishman Comes Back Home." *Literary*

Interrelations: Ireland, England, and the World. Eds. Wolfgang Zach and Heinz Kozok. Vol. 3. Studies in English and Comparative Literature. Tubingen: Narr, 1987. 223-28.

Roche, Anthony. "A Bit Off the Map: Brian Friel's *Translations* and Shakespeare's *Henry IV*." *Literary Interrelations: Ireland, England, and the World*. Eds. Wolfgang Zach and Heinz Kozok. Vol. 2. Studies in English and Comparative Literature. Tubingen: Narr, 1987. 139-48.

---. *Contemporary Irish Drama: From Beckett to McGuinness*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

---. "Friel and Synge: Towards a Theatrical Language." *Irish University Review* 29.1 (1999): 145-61.

Rollins, Ronald. "Friel's *Translations*: The Ritual of Naming." *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 11.1 (1985): 35-43.

Ronan, Farren. "Broadway? Who Cares!" *Brian Friel in Conversation*. Ed. Paul Delaney. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 123-26.

Sacks, Oliver. *Island of the Colour Blind*. New York: Knopf, 1997.

---. "to See and Not See." *An Anthropologist on Mars: Seven Paradoxical Tales*. Toronto: Vintage, 1996. 108-48.

Schneider, Ulrich. "Staging History in Contemporary Anglo-Irish Drama: Brian Friel and Frank McGuinness." *The Crows Behind the Plough: History and Violence in Anglo-Irish Poetry and Drama*. Ed. Geert Lernhout. Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 1991. 79-115.

Schrank, Bernice. "Politics and Language in the Plays of Sean O'Casey and Brian Friel." *Anglo-Irish and Irish Literature: Aspects of Language and Culture*. Eds. Birgit Bramsback and Martin Croghan. Vol. 2. Uppsala: Uppsala UP, 1988. 71-76.

Sharkey, Patricia. "Friel's Latest: Making History Work Overtime." Rev. of *Making History*, dir. Simon Curtis. Field Day Theatre. Gaiety, Theatre, Dublin. *Irish Literary Supplement* (Spring 1989): 14.

Silverstein, Marc. "'It's Only a Name': Schemes of Identification and the National Community in 'Translations'." *Essays in Theatre* 10.2 (1992): 133-42.

Singleton, Brian. "Should We Be Festivalising Friel?" *Irish Times* 22 Apr. 1999: FeaturesOnline.

Smith, Wendy. "Joe Dowling Likes His Actors to Feel Free." *New York Times* 4 Sept.

1994: H5.

Spillane, Margaret. "Friel's *Molly Sweeney*." Rev. of *Molly Sweeney*, dir. Brian Friel. Laura Pels Theater, New York. *Nation* 262.9 (1996): 33-5.

Taylor, Kate. "Small Details Make a Compelling Drama." Rev. of *Molly Sweeney*, dir. Miles Potter. Grand Theatre, London, Ontario, Canada. *The Globe and Mail* 22 Jan. 1998: A12.

Taylor, Paul. "Coming Up Clean From a Writer's Dirty Laundry." Rev. of *Give Me Your Answer, Do!*, dir. Robert Lefevre. *The Independent* 1 Apr. 1998: 14.

Throne, Marilyn. "Brian Friel's 'Faith Healer': Portrait of a Shaman." *Journal of Irish Literature* 16.3 (1987): 18-24.

---. "The Disintegration of Authority: A Study of the Fathers in Five Plays of Brian Friel." *Colby Library Quarterly* 24.3 (1988): 162-72.

Tillinghast, Richard. "Brian Friel: Transcending the Irish National Pastime." *The New Criterion* 10.2 (1991): 35-41.

Timm, Eitel F. "Modern Mind, Myth, and History: Brian Friel's *Translations*." *Studies in Anglo-Irish Literature*. Ed. Heinz Kozok. Wuppertaler Schriftenreihe Literartur 19. Bonn: Bouvier, 1982. 447-54.

Tompkins, Joanne. "Breaching the Body's Boundaries: Abjected Subject Positions in Postcolonial Drama." *Modern Drama* 40.4 (1997): 502-13.

Torrens, J. S. "Blindsighted." Rev. of *Molly Sweeney*, dir. Brian Friel. Laura Pels Theater, New York. *America* 174.7 (2 Mar. 1996): 22.

---. "Why Theater?" Rev. of *Making History*. Irish Repertory Theatre, New York. *America* 164.20 (25 May 1991): 575-6.

Upton, Carole-Anne. "Visions of the Sightless in Friel's *Molly Sweeney* and Synge's *The Well of the Saints*." *Modern Drama* 40 (1997): 347-58.

Velten, Christa. "'Is Athene Sufficiently Mortal?': Myth As Reality -- Reality As Myth -- In Brian Friel's *Translations* in Relation to George Steiner's *After Babel*." *The Classical World and the Mediterranean*. Ed. Giuseppe Serpillo and Donatella Badin. Italy: Tema, 1996. 235-41.

Verstraete, Ginette. "Brian Friel's Drama and the Limits of Language." *History and Violence in Anglo-Irish Literature*. Eds. Joris Duytschaever and Geert Lernhout. Amsterdam: Ropodi, 1988. 85-96.

Welch, Robert. "'Isn't This Your Job to Translate?': Brian Friel's Languages." *The Achievement of Brian Friel*. Ed. Alan J. Peacock. Ulster Editions and Monographs 4. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1993. 134-48.

White, Harry. "Brian Friel and the Condition of Music." *Irish University Review* 29.1 (1999): 6-15.

---. "Brien Friel, Thomas Murphy and the Use of Music in Contemporary Irish Drama." *Modern Drama* 33.4 (1990): 553-62.

Wiley, Catherine. "Recreating Ballybeg: Two Translations by Brian Friel." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 1.2 (1987): 51-61.

Winkler, Elizabeth Hale. "Brian Friel's 'The Freedom of the City': Historical Actuality and Dramatic Imagination." *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 7.1 (1981): 12-31.

---. "Reflections of Ireland's Bloody Sunday in Literature." *Studies in Anglo-Irish Literature*. Ed. Heinz Kozok. Wuppertaler Schriftenreihe Literartur 19. Bonn: Bouvier, 1982. 411-21.

Wolf, Matt. "Abroad: Molly Sweeney." Rev. of *Molly Sweeney*, dir. Brian Friel. Gate Theatre, Dublin. *Variety* 7-13 Nov. 1994: 58.

---. "Catherine Byrne." *American Theatre* 13.1 (Jan. 1996): 46.

---. "Epiphany's Threshold." *American Theatre* 11.4 (Apr. 1994): 12-17.

---. "A Five-Sister Play, a 'Family' of Actors." *New York Times* 20 Oct. 1991: 5,11.

Worth, Katharine. "Translations of History: Story-Telling in Brian Friel's Theatre." *British and Irish Drama Since 1960*. Ed. James Acheson. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1993. 73-87.

Worthen, W. B. "Homeless Words: Field Day and the Politics of Translation." *Modern Drama* 38 (1995): 22-41.

Zach, Wolfgang. "Brian Friel's *Translations*: National and Universal Dimensions." *Medieval and Modern Ireland*. Totowa: Barnes and Noble, 1988. 74-90.

---. "Criticism, Theatre and Politics: Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City* and Its Early Reception." *Irish Literature and Culture*. Ed. Michael Kennealy. Irish Literary Studies 35. GerrardsCross: Colin Smythe, 1992. 112-26.

APPENDIX

CRITICAL RESPONSES TO *TRANSLATIONS*

See the following for discussions of the play broken into their primary focus on single subject such as staging, language, history or public, communal memory. At the end see more overlapping discussions, though of course many of the others also overlap, of myth, history, language, and identity.

Staging

For staging, particularly see Roche, "A Bit off the Map: Brian Friel's *Translations* and Shakespeare's *Henry IV*"; also see Arkins, "The role of Greek and Latin in Friel's *Translations*"; Etherton, *Contemporary Irish Dramatists*; Worthen, "Homeless Words: Field Day and the Politics of Translation"; and Burke, "'As If Language No Longer Existed': Non-verbal Theatricality in the Plays of Brian Friel."

Language: Naming and Being

For a discussion of language and imperialism focussing on naming and being, see Kearney, "Language Play: Brian Friel and Ireland's Verbal Theatre" and "Friel and the Politics of Language Play"; Meissner, "Words Between Worlds: the Irish Language, the English Army, and the Violence of Translation in Brian Friel's *Translations*"; McGrath, "Brian Friel and the Irish Art of Lying"; Wiley, "Recreating Ballybeg: Two Translations by Brian Friel"; Shaun Richards, "The Changing Landscape of Fact: English as 'Necessary Sin' in Contemporary Irish Literature"; Silverstein, 'It's Only a Name': Schemes of Identification and the National Community in *Translations*"; Deane, "The Name of the Game"; Verstraete, "Brian Friel's Drama and the Limits of Language"; Schrank, "Politics and Language in the Plays of Sean O'Casey and Brian Friel"; Welch, "'Isn't this Your Job to Translate?': Brian Friel's Languages"; Dantanus, "Brian Friel: A Study"; Lee "Linguistic

Imperialism, the Early Abbey Theatre, and the *Translations* of Brian Friel."

Language: Translation

For a discussion of language using translation as a trope for the postcolonial, this play, and Friel's work in general, see Worthen, "Homeless Words: Field Day and the Politics of Translation"; Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland*; Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama*; Lojek, "Brian Friel's Plays and George Steiner's Linguistics: Translating the Irish"; and McGrath, *Brian Friel's (Post)Colonial Drama.*

Language: Greek and Latin

For an examination of the use of Latin and Greek (language and references), see Cullingford, "British Romans and Irish Carthaginians: Anticolonial metaphor in Heaney, Friel, and McGuinness"; Arkins, "The role of Greek and Latin in Friel's *Translations*"; Velten, "Is Athene Sufficiently Mortal?': Myth as Reality -- Reality as Myth -- In Brian Friel's *Translations* in Relation to George Steiner's *After Babel*"; and Peacock, "Translating the Past: Friel, Greece and Rome." For an examination of the veneration of Latin and Greek and a response against a veneration of the Irish language at the heart of the play, see Boltwood, "'Swapping Stories About Apollo and Cuchulainn': Brian Friel and the De-Gaelicizing of Ireland."

History

For a discussion of Friel's use (or misuse?) of history see Pelletier, "Telling Stories and Making History: Brian Friel and Field Day"; Schneider, "Staging History in Contemporary Anglo-Irish Drama: Brian Friel and Frank McGuinness"; Elmer Andrews, *The Art of Brian Friel*; Connolly's rash "Dreaming History: Brian Friel's *Translations*," and his more considered "Translating History: Brian Friel and the Irish past"; J.H. Andrews, "Notes for a

Future Edition of Brian Friel's *Translations*" and Barry, Friel, Andrews, "*Translations* and *A Paper Landscape*: Between Fiction and History"; and Gleitman, "Negotiating History, Negotiating Myth: Friel among His Contemporaries."

Myth, History, Identity, Language

Finally, for critics interrelating Friel's uses of myth, history, identity, and language see Robbins, "Conjuring the Life of the Spirit in the Plays of Brian Friel"; Kelly, "Homecomings and Diversions: Cultural Nationalism and the Recent Drama of Brian Friel"; McGrath, "Brian Friel and the Politics of the Anglo-Irish Language" and "Language, Myth, and History in the Later Plays of Brian Friel"; Achilles, "Intercultural Relations in Brian Friel's Works"; Shaun Richards, "Placed Identities for Placeless Times: Brian Friel and Postcolonial Criticism"; Rollins, "Friel's *Translations*: The Ritual of Naming"; Bradley, Brian Friel's *Translations*"; Bertha, "Tragedies of National Fate: a Comparison Between Brian Friel's *Translations* and its Hungarian Counterpart, András Sutö's "*a szuzai menyegz*ö"; Regan, "*Translations* by Brian Friel"; Zach, "Brian Friel's *Translations*: National and Universal Dimensions"; Timm, "Modern Mind, Myth, and History: Brian Friel's *Translations*"; O'Brien, *Brian Friel.*